

## The Asanids

# East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450

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VOLUME 41

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# The Asanids

*The Political and Military History of the  
Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280)*

By

Alexandru Madgearu



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Originally published as *Asăneștii. Istoria politico-militară a statului dinastiei Asan (1185–1280)*.  
Copyright: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2014, Romania.

Cover illustration: The Church of Saint Demetrios in Târnovo, as now rebuilt. Author's photo.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Madgearu, Alexandru, author.

Title: The Asanids : the political and military history of the second  
Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280) / by Alexandru Madgearu.

Other titles: Așaneștii. English

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2017] | Series: East Central and  
Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, ISSN 1872-8103 ; volume 41 |  
Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016044384 (print) | LCCN 2016045170 (ebook) | ISBN  
9789004325012 (hardback : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9789004333192 (e-book) |  
ISBN 9789004333192 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Asen dynasty. | Bulgaria—History—1185–1393. |  
Bulgaria—Kings and rulers—History. | Bulgaria—Politics and government.  
| Bulgaria—History, Military.

Classification: LCC DR80 .M3313 2017 (print) | LCC DR80 (ebook) | DDC  
949.9/014—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016044384>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 1872-8103

ISBN 978-90-04-32501-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-33319-2 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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## The Sources

The internal sources provide only some scattered information about the political and military events of 1185–1280, the period during which the dynasty founded by the two brothers Peter and Asan led the Second Bulgarian Empire, revived by the Vlach<sup>1</sup> and Bulgarian rebellion against Byzantium.

The most important internal sources are the letters sent to Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) by Johannitsa (Ioniță) (1197–1207) and his Archbishop Basil. Those letters were written in Bulgarian or Greek, but survive only in Latin translation. They reflect international relations and particularly the political ideology of the new state (the pope's claim of the imperial title as a source of legitimacy different from Constantinople).<sup>2</sup> John Asan II (1218–1241), whose rule coincided with the apex of the Empire's territorial expansion, won the great victory of Klokochnitsa against the Greek Empire of Thessaloniki (March 9th 1230), which he celebrated by means of an inscription on a pillar in the Church of the "Forty Martyrs" in Tărnovo.<sup>3</sup> A foundation inscription has been laid in 1231 at the gate of the Stenimachos fort, (now known as *Asenova krepost*, near Asenovgrad in the Rhodopi mountains). It was destroyed in 1883, but a facsimile<sup>4</sup> has been preserved. Also, John Asan II exchanged letters with Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241)<sup>5</sup> and granted trading privileges to Ragusa. The charter for Ragusa is very important for understanding Bulgarian realities (see chapter 8).

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- 1 The Slavs, followed by Greeks and Hungarians, typically called the Romanians with the names *Vlachi*, *Valachi*, *Volohi*, *Blachi* or *Blachi*. Initially, the word was applied by the Germanic populations to Romanized Celts; afterwards it was borrowed by the Slavs and given to various Romance-speaking populations, including the Romanians (see Armbruster 1993, 18–22). Byzantine authors could not have possibly employed the self-designation of the Romanians (*Român* or *Armân*), even if they knew about it, because they called themselves *Romaioi*, that is "citizens of the Roman Empire". One of these Byzantine authors, John Kinnamos, was aware of the Italic origin of the "Vlachs", but he too called them by that same name.
  - 2 PL, vol. 214, 1112–1113 (n. CXV), 1115–1116 (n. CXVII); vol. 215, 155–156 (n. CXLII), 288–292 (n. V–VII), 551–554 (n. CCXXX, CCXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 2–3 (doc. II), 5 (doc. IV), 10–11 (doc. X), 26–31 (doc. XVIII–XXI), 48–50 (doc. XXXIV, XXXV) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 562–564, 569–570, 572–579 (n. 8, II, 13–17); Hendrickx 1970, 142–143; Petkov 2008, 219–230.
  - 3 Malingoudis 1979, 53–59; Petkov 2008, 425; Angelov 2011, 106.
  - 4 Malingoudis 1979, 60–62; Petkov 2008, 426; Angelov 2011, 106–107.
  - 5 *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 660 (nr. 3694), 673 (nr. 3720).

There also are some religious texts comprising historical information. Emperor Boril's *Synodikon* mentions the names of several tsars. This text, adopted at the anti-Bogomil synod summoned in Tărnovo, in 1211, was based on the *Synodikon* of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, itself adopted in Constantinople in 843, and was, in essence, a collection of anathemas directed against the Bogomil heretics. Until late 14th century, references of some historical importance had been repeatedly added to it (the final form is ascribed to Saint Euthymios, the last Patriarch of Tărnovo, 1375–1393). Unfortunately, no complete manuscript of this text has survived; it has been reconstructed based on two complementary versions, dating from 1382 and the 16th century, respectively. Some of the historical information is only found in the later version (edited first by Marin Drinov in 1876).<sup>6</sup> Likewise, information about the history of the Asanids can be found in the *Life of Saint Ivan of Rila*, in the *Life of Saint Paraskeva* (also called Petka by the Bulgarians), in the *Life of Saint Ivan Polivotski*, as well as in a text referring to the translation of the relics of Saint *Ilarion of Moglena*.<sup>7</sup>

Another category of internal sources is represented by the seals and sigillary rings belonging to the tsars (Asan, Johannitsa, Boril, John Asan II, Mičo Asan and Constantine Asan), but also to boyars in charge of certain matters of state. They attest not only their names, but also the titles they held.<sup>8</sup> The coins issued in Bulgaria, bearing the tsars' names and titles, as well as the archaeological discoveries from fortifications and other sites, represent a different kind of evidence that can also be included in the category of internal sources.

External sources are divided into several categories, according to their origin. First, the Byzantine sources. The most important one is the history of Niketas Choniates, both because the author was contemporary with the events, and because his work provides detailed records. As dignitary (he was the duke of the Philippopolis theme), he had access to accurate information regarding the development of conflicts, sometimes even taking part in the events as secretary to the emperor during campaigns. When describing battles, Niketas is remarkably accurate, even in the speeches attributed to Isaac II.

Another contemporary of the Asanids revolt was archbishop Eustathios of Thessaloniki. One of his speeches (from 1191) contains a valuable description of the Cumans, the allies of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, who attacked the

6 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko; Dujčev 1980, 120–124; Butler 1996, 203–215; Podskalsky 2000, 247–250; Mălinaș 2000, 168–176; Tanașoca 2003, 217–218; Petkov 2008, 249–261; Angelov 2011, 108.

7 Podskalsky 2000, 288–293, 309–313; Petkov 2008, 262–277, 339–350.

8 Gerasimov 1960, 63–68; Jordanov 2001, 99–102, 105, 110, 113, 117–118; Petkov 2008, 217–218.

city in which he ministered.<sup>9</sup> A concise chronicle from Creation to 1453 (the so-called Pseudo-Kodinos), written by four different authors, is also important because a contemporary, unknown author is responsible for the third part, which covers the reigns of Isaac II Angelos and Alexios III Angelos.<sup>10</sup> In addition, some information on the conflicts can be found in the speeches delivered by John Syropoulos, Euthymios Tornikes, George Tornikes II, Constantine Stilbes, Sergios Kolyvas, Niketas Choniates and Michael Choniates (the archbishop of Athens and Niketas' brother).

George Akropolites (1217–1282), who held important civil and military offices in the Byzantine Empire of Nicaea, continued the historical writings of Niketas Choniates. His work was written at a time when the state founded by the Asan brothers was in decline and had completely assumed a Bulgarian identity. He omitted the role of the Vlachs in its creation, although he was otherwise well informed on the contemporary situation (in 1260 he was sent as an emissary to Tsar Constantine Asan in Tărnovo).<sup>11</sup> For the same late period, the historical writings of George Pachymeres provide much information, sometimes supplemented by the work of a later author, Nikephoros Gregoras. The universal chronicle compiled by Theodore Skutariotes (in prose) and Ephrem the Monk (in verse) were profusely inspired by Niketas Choniates and George Akropolites. Both texts conveyed selectively and in an abridged manner the information comprised in the historical writings of Niketas Choniates. Thus, they hold little significance for that period, rendering their citation superfluous. However, for the period after 1204, Theodore Skutariotes and even Ephrem provided some information not found in the historical writings of George Akropolites, which is to be taken into account.<sup>12</sup> In Thessaloniki, the deacon John Staurakios wrote in the late 13th century a version of the miracles of Saint Demetrios, which includes a story of the Vlach, Cuman and Bulgarian attacks on the city. The details he provides are plausible.<sup>13</sup> Another account of the saint's miracles was written at a later time by Constantine Akropolites, the son of the historian. The poet Manuel Philes (1275–1345) composed a laudatory

9 Eustathios, 41–45 (FHDR III, 176/177–180/181).

10 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, I, 148–149; II, 181–182; III, 45–46 (FHDR IV, 88/89–90/91); Brezeanu 1989a, 66–67.

11 For the value and the significance of the work see Tanașoca 2003, 84–95; Macrides 2007, 29–64.

12 Skutariotes, ed. Sathas, 457–556 (FHDR III, 412–441); Ephraemius, ed. Bekker, 237–342 (FHDR III, 460–481). According to the recent studies, it is not sure that Theodore Skutariotes was the autor of that writing (Macrides 2007, 66–71).

13 Ioannes Staurakios, c. 34–35 (ed. Iberites, 369–372; FGHB X, pp. 126–132; FHDR IV, 94/95–96/97).

poem, which includes some information on the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflicts of 1263 and 1278–1279.

Another category of external sources is represented by Western accounts of the Third and Fourth Crusades. For the Third Crusade (1189–1192), the most useful source is *Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris* ascribed to a monk named Ansbertus, who accompanied Emperor Frederic I Barbarossa (1155–1190) on his journey to Constantinople, including over lands inhabited by Serbs, Vlachs and Bulgarians.<sup>14</sup> It also contains the emperor's letter to his son Henry, which provides a more concise description of the events. Another account, which differs quite largely from Ansbertus' work, is *Historia peregrinorum*, written by another German monk who took part in the crusade.<sup>15</sup> Another participant to the crusade, Tageno, dean of the Cathedral in Passau, authored a briefer account which was edited together with other texts in a book published in Augsburg in 1522 (*Expeditio Asiatica adversus Turcas et Saracenos Imperatoris Friderici Primi*). This text is slightly different from the one inserted in *Annales Reicherspergenses*.<sup>16</sup> Other informations on the crusaders' march can be found in the chronicles of the bishop Sicardus of Cremona, written in 1212,<sup>17</sup> of Albertus Miliol, notary of Regensburg, who wrote in 1260–1270,<sup>18</sup> as well as in other sources to be mentioned later on.

The *Nibelungenlied* was written in the same period, right after the Third Crusade. Placed retrospectively in the time of Attila (Etzel), the narrative contains many anachronisms, including ethnic names stemming from the time it was written. The same applies to Vlachia, the country of duke Ramunc, who came with 700 horsemen at Attila's court (*Der herzoge Ramunc uzer Vlachen lant*). Vlachs (*Vlachen*), who had excellent horses, much like the Poles, are mentioned alongside Pechenegs (*Pescenaere*) and Russians. This is why the reference is usually considered to concern the Romanians settled north to the Danube.<sup>19</sup> It has been established that the epic poem was written around 1200 by a poet at the court of Bishop Wolfger von Erla of Passau.<sup>20</sup> At that time,

14 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 27–69 (transl. Loud 59–95; FLHB III, pp. 252–291).

15 *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 131–152 (FLHB III, pp. 221–244).

16 Tageno, 509–510 (transl. Loud, 150–153). Sometimes, the relation is ascribed to the bishop Diepold von Berg, who was escorted by Tageno.

17 Sicardus, 169.

18 Albertus Miliol, 647–648.

19 Armbruster 1990, 54–60; Spinei 2009, 255. On the contrary, Popa-Lisseanu 1935, 11 does not exclude the location south of the Danube, while Schuster 1946–1952, 284–290 considers that Ramunc reflected the image of Johannitsa.

20 *Nibelungenlied*, 212 (strofele 1366, 1367, 1370). For the date and place of the composition see Andersson 1987, 100–101. Ramunc or *Ramunge uz der Vlachen lant* also appears in

the only country (*lant*) who could have been called *Vlachia* was the Romanian-Bulgarian Empire,<sup>21</sup> and the information regarding it could only have come from bishop Diepold or from Tageno, who passed through that region, and not through the lands inhabited by Romanians north of the Danube. This is a fact which has not been considered hitherto by Romanian historiography, when interpreting the passage in the *Nibelungenlied*, as well as its continuation entitled *Die Klage* ("The Lament"), featuring *Sigeher von Wallachen*, one of the three East European rulers serving Etzel, together with Hermann from Poland and Walber from Turkey.<sup>22</sup> *Ramunc* is by no means a name inspired by the ethnonym *Romanian*, as it was speculated,<sup>23</sup> because it is attested in the German onomastics of that time.<sup>24</sup> As with Sigeher or Walber, the names were randomly chosen by the authors of the epic poems.

For the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), which in fact led to the division of the Byzantine Empire, but also for the following years, the sources are much more consistent, as they concern an important period in the evolution of the Asanid state. Moreover, one of these sources is linked to a key figure in these events, Geoffroy de Villehardouin (about 1150–1213), one of the most important crusade leaders (he became marshal of the Latin Empire). This great French nobleman was also a writer. Besides its value for the medieval French literature (it is considered the most remarkable chronicle), his work (*La conquête de Constantinople*), is a source of first-hand information on the development of the crusade seen through the eyes of someone who had a broad perspective. His account is precise and credible, although Geoffroy attempted to justify the diversion of the crusade towards the Byzantine Empire (on the other hand, he admitted that the defeats suffered had been God's punishment for the crusaders' behavior in Constantinople).<sup>25</sup> For the period between 1208 and 1209, his work was continued by the cleric Henri de Valenciennes (it has survived in four of the Geoffroy de Villehardouin's manuscripts). There is, however, a lacuna for the period September 4th 1207 and May 25th 1208, which has not been addressed by either of the two authors. The analysis of Henri de Valenciennes's

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the poem Biterolf und Dietlieb written by the middle of the 13th century somewhere in Austria (*Biterolf*, 18, 51, 55, 56).

21 As also considers Magoun Jr. 1945, 130.

22 *Nibelungenklage*, 92, 93, 520 (strophe 345: *Sigeher von Vlâchen*).

23 Găzdaru 1954, 99–104; Armbruster 1973, 96; Curta 2006, 355.

24 Konrad Ramunc, a man from Konstanz in a document dated to 1239 (*Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg: Württembergisches Urkundenbuch Online*, Band VI, 462, Nr. N19 (<http://www.wubonline.de/?wub=1378>)).

25 About his work see Noble 2001, 404–410; Pecican 2010, 58–70; Geoffroy, transl. Fluieraru, 5–20.

work, which also contains enough detail concerning the development of these events, reveals that he justified the existence of the Latin Empire as defender of papal interests.<sup>26</sup>

A French translation of the work of William of Tyre, the First Crusade chronicler, was the basis for the first part of the so-called *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, which recounts the deeds carried out in 1099–1232 in Outremer. The narrative focuses on the Third and Fourth Crusades. The identity of Ernoul remains uncertain, but we know that Bernard, the one who carried on the work, was the treasurer of the Saint Pierre Abbey of Corbie in 1232.<sup>27</sup> Bernard broadly recounted the battle of Adrianople on April 14th 1205 and also mentioned the marriage of Latin Emperor Henry I of Hainaut (1206–1216) with Johannitsa's daughter, using other sources than Geoffroy de Villehardouin's work.<sup>28</sup>

The work of the knight Robert de Clari provides the most vivid description of the events between 1198 and 1216, related by a petty nobleman from Picardy. He wrote it after he became a monk in the same abbey in Corbie where the only manuscript, which is not his handwritten original, has been written (only one copy from early 14th century survives in the Royal Library in Copenhagen).<sup>29</sup> Without having the same broad perspective as Geoffroy, Robert is representative for the common soldier mentality, a fervent fighter for the Christian cause, and convinced, on the other hand, that the occupation of Constantinople was justified, signifying the reconquest of the territory that once belonged to Troy, the ancient homeland of the French, according to the contemporary belief (as the nobleman Pierre de Bracheux boasted during a meeting with Johannitsa, recounted by Robert de Clari). The legend of the Trojan origin, already popular among French noblemen, was used by crusaders to justify the division of the territories taken from the former empire, which would have gone to the rightful heirs, the descendants of the Trojans. This is how they could legitimize abandoning the initial objective of the crusade.<sup>30</sup> The same idea of French Trojan origin appears in *Historia Regum Francorum*, written in verse by Philippe Mousket or Mouskés in the mid-13th century. He imagined a mythical history of the kings of France, descendants of Trojans. In the final part, which

26 For his conception see Noble 2001, 413–415; Cristea 2002, 243–253. A Romanian translation was recently published: Henri de Valenciennes, *Istorsisirea*.

27 Croizy-Naquet 2001, 313–327.

28 Bernard, ed. Las Matric, 378–389, 391, 393, 394 (trad. Fluieraru, 200–201, 210, 212, 213).

29 About his life and work see Noble 2001, 410–413; Robert de Clari, transl. Fluieraru, 5–45; Markov 2008, 14–20; Pecican 2010, 70–93.

30 Robert de Clari, c. 106 (ed. Lauer, 102; transl. Fluieraru, 164); Brătianu 1929, 52–55; Brătianu 1980, 76–77; Shawcross 2003, 127–136; Pecican 2010, 81–85, 94–109; Curta 2016, 428.

goes up to 1242 there are some references to *blasi/blachi* who came into contact with the French conquerors of Constantinople, an information probably originating from some *chansons de geste* that are now lost.<sup>31</sup> The author was mistakenly identified with a bishop of Tournai (who was in office between 1274 and 1283). In 1845 and 1906, respectively, the philologists B. C. du Mortier and Auguste Molinier ascribed this work to a burgher of Tournai with the same name, a theory which has been recently revived.<sup>32</sup> Johannitsa's conflicts with the Latins have also been mentioned by the Provençal troubadour Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, a companion of the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, who became king of Thessaloniki in 1204.<sup>33</sup>

Other Western sources from the period immediately following the Fourth Crusade are the letters of Emperor Henry I of Hainaut, the account of Emperor Baldwin I from *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, the already mentioned chronicle of Sicardus (the author was in Constantinople in 1204), as well as the annals of Ogerio Pane from Genoa (1219), *Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium* (1209), and Cistercian abbot Ralph (Radulfus) of Coggeshall's (1224) *Chronicon Anglicanum*. They briefly recount the conflict between Johannitsa and the Latin Empire of Constantinople.<sup>34</sup>

In Flanders, the country of the future first Latin Emperor of Constantinople, count Baldwin IX of Hainaut or of Flanders (1194–1205), the Chronicle of Baudoin d'Avesnes was written around 1284, containing some information regarding the conflicts with Johannitsa. Recently, it has been reedited and translated by the Bulgarian historian Nikolaj Markov (he observed that Baudoin and Mouskés used the same unknown source). The *Chronique de Flandre* (*Istorie et chronique de Flandre* or *Chronique de Flandres*) is a later

31 The source was used in the Romanian historiography by Ciobanu 1976, 249–256 (see also Ciobanu 1985, 158, 167, 171, 172), but with some omissions, confusions and mistakes which will be further noted (the reason was perhaps the use of an old and partial edition, from 1729: *Histoire de l'empire de Constantinople sous les empereurs françois: divisée en deux parties, dont la première contient l'Histoire de la conquête de la ville de Constantinople par les françois, & les Venitiens, écrite par Geoffry de Ville-Harduin (...) avec la suite de cette histoire, jusques à l'an MCCXL tirée de l'Histoire de France ms. de Philippes Mouskes (...)*, Venezia, 1729). The first Romanian historian who quoted a fragment of this work was Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu in 1898 (Hasdeu 1976, 694). Some lines were quoted by Iorga 1937, 116, Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 39, Panaitescu 1969, 264, and Popa-Lisseanu 1935, 27–28. All these remained unknown to R. Șt. Ciobanu (Vergatti).

32 Bărâny 2013, 28–29.

33 Agrigoroaei 2009; Henri de Valenciennes, *Istorisirea*, 221.

34 Ogerio (ed. Pertz, 123; FLHB IV, 144; ed. Belgrano, 95); *Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium*, 118; Radulphus of Coggeshall, 161–162 (Andrea 2008, 255, 287–288).

source, written in French in the mid-14th century. In contrast with the chronicle of Baudoin d'Avesnes, covering the years 792–1342, it does not derive from Geoffroy de Villehardouin's accounts, but was instead based on certain traditions preserved by the local nobility. Nevertheless, the chronicle of Flanders has been seldom used by historians concerned with the conflict between the crusaders and Johannitsa.<sup>35</sup>

*The Chronicle of Morea* was first written in Greek in 1320–1330 and altered over time. It was preserved in four versions in verse (Greek, French, Italian and Aragonese). It recounts the conquest of Peloponnesus (also called Morea) by the Western lords participating in the Fourth Crusade, and the history of the principedom founded there in 1205 by Geoffroy de Villehardouin, the nephew of the aforementioned chronicler. It also contains information on the conflict between the Latin Empire of Constantinople and Johannitsa, transmitted through oral tradition.<sup>36</sup>

Another category of Western external sources is represented by some universal chronicles written later on, in the 13th and 14th centuries, particularly in monasteries (Albericus Trium Fontium, Robert de Auxerre, Iohannes Longus de Ypre) or in the cities (Albertus Miliol). The information contained, although scarce, sometimes includes details otherwise not found in the main Western sources.

Constantin Șerban<sup>37</sup> brought into discussion the work of Flavio Biondo (1392–1463), *Historiarum ab Inclinacione Romanorum Imperii*, also known as *Decades*, published first in 1483 in Venice. Although important in itself for the evolution of the Renaissance historiography, the brief passage mentioning the Vlachs as participants in the battle of Adrianople<sup>38</sup> is not particularly useful, since Flavio Biondo knew nothing about the Vlachs south of the Danube. He mistook them for Romanians north of the Danube, some of whom he had

35 Cankova-Petkova 1976, 52 was the first who noticed its value.

36 For the date and the composition of the chronicle see Božilov 1977a, 38–39; Shawcross 2009.

37 Șerban 1981, 232–236.

38 *Valachi olim gens Romana, ulteriorem Danubii ripam accolens, Bulgaris citerioribus coniuncti, a Grecis prece magis quam precio sollicitati constituerant Adrianopolim ne in potestatem Latinorum veniret, conservare* (Flavius Blondus, *Historiarum ab Inclinacione Romanorum Imperii*, Basileae (Basel), 1531, 272). This writing was subsequently summarized by Antonius Bonfinius, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*, Francofurti, 1581, 277, who was instead aware of the existence of the north-Danubian Romanians (of Roman origin), and then by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Abbreviationum Flavii Blondi Foroliviensis Historiarum ab inclinacione Imperii usque ad tempora Ioannis xxiii*, in *Opere quae extant omnia*, Basileae, 1511, 232 (*Valachi gens olim Romana, ultra Danubii ripam sita Bulgari vicina cum magnus copiis a Grecis accerssiti, Adrianopolim duxere, simul cum Bulgaris*).



personally met in Rome.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Flavio Biondo took the passage in question from Bartolomeo Platina (1421–1481), the author of a compilation relating the lives of the popes, first published in 1474, and then reprinted several times.<sup>40</sup> *De Bello Constantinopolitano*, another compilation by the Venetian Paulo Ramusio from 1572, is equally meaningless, as it is only significant for the way in which the information from French and Byzantine writings was received.<sup>41</sup> There are in fact several Venetian chronicles from the 14th to 16th century which mention the conflicts of the Latin Empire of Constantinople with Johannitsa, Boril and John Asan II, but do not convey information from other lost sources, contemporary with the events. Other Venetian chronicles anachronistically place Vlachs, Bulgarians and Cumans in the narrative about the life of Attila, because Johannitsa's image was eventually identified with the figure of Attila.<sup>42</sup> Only two Venetian historical works are truly useful for the period of the Latin Empire, those written by Marino Sanudo Torsello in 1321, and by Andrea Dandolo in 1350, both based on older sources.

In addition to these categories of narrative sources, there are the letters. Most important of all is the correspondence of Pope Innocent III with Johannitsa and his Archbishop Basil, with Emeric, the King of Hungary, as well as with the Latin Emperor of Constantinople, Henry I de Hainaut.<sup>43</sup> Equally important is the correspondence of Pope Gregory IX with the Latin emperor of Constantinople, Baldwin II (1228–1261), with the Hungarian king Béla IV (1235–1270), and with Hungarian clergymen. These letters contain references to Bulgaria under John Asan II.<sup>44</sup> The three letters of Emperor Henry I of Hainaut from 1205, 1206 and 1212, recounting in detail the conflicts with Johannitsa and

39 Armbruster 1993, 56–57.

40 *Onde mentre, che combatte questa città, se ne concitò sopra i Valachi che sono dalle parti di là del Danubio, ed i Bulgari loro convicini* (B. Platina, *Storia delle vite dei pontefici da Platina e d'altri autori: dal Salvatore Nostro Gesu Christo fino a Clemente XIII* (...), tomo III, Venezia, 1763, 53).

41 Marin 2000, 51–120.

42 Caroldo, pp. 41, 177; Marin 2003, 113–115; Pecican 2002, 39–45.

43 PL, vol. 214, 825 (n. CCLXVI), 1113–1115 (n. CXVI), 1116–1118 (n. CXIX); vol. 215, 156–158 (n. CXLIII, CXLIV), 277–288 (n. I–IV), 292–297 (n. VIII–XIV), 410–417 (n. CXXVI, CXXVII), 427 (CXXXVII), 698 (CXXV), 710 (CXXXII) = Hurmuzaki, Densuşianu 1887, 1 (doc. I), 3–5 (doc. III), 6–7 (doc. V), 9 (doc. IX), 11–13 (doc. XI), 17–25 (doc. XV–XVII), 31–39 (n. XXII–XXIX), 40–47 (doc. XXXI–XXXIII), 51–56 (doc. XXXVII–XL) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 207, 226–230, 241–243, 249–268, 271–275 (nr. 17, 29, 30, 41, 47–57, 62, 63); Hendrickx 1970, 140–141, 143–144.

44 *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 217–218 (n. 2872), 391 (n. 3156), 672 (n. 3716), 673 (n. 3179), 875–876 (n. 4056–4059), 877 (n. 4063), 1108–1110 (n. 4482–4490), 1131–1132 (n. 4523); *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 290, 302–303, 325, 327, 328 (nr. 214, 226, 248, 249).

Boril, which have seldom been mentioned in Romanian historiography, are also of great importance.<sup>45</sup>

Some unique information about the reign of Johannitsa and Boril can only be found in Serbian sources: the biography of the grand župan Stephen Nemanja, written in 1216 by his son Stephen the First-Crowned, and in the two versions of the life of Saint Sabbas, the other son of the grand župan (his layman name was Rastko). The former was written by Domentian in 1254, and the latter by Theodosij of Hilandar in 1292.<sup>46</sup> There is also some information from Hungarian sources (Rogerius' account of the Mongol invasion, the 14th century chronicles, and some royal documents).

After the 1241–1242 Mongol invasion, which also affected Bulgaria, this state is mentioned in some eastern sources: “General History” (*Djami ot- Tevarikh*), written by the Persian scholar and vizier Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din (1247–1318) in 1310<sup>47</sup> and “The history of al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars reign in Egypt”, by Ibn Taghrībirdī (1410–1470), who drew information from the lost book of Ibn Shaddād, a contemporary of the events.<sup>48</sup> The Asanid state has also been mentioned by the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck, who was an envoy in 1253 to the court of Khan Möngke. Describing the immensity of the Mongol empire, he stated that Asan's Vlachia paid tribute to the Mongols. The great Armenian scholar Vardan Arewelc'i or Areveltsi (1198–1271) mentioned the Vlachs in connection with the Third Crusade. The passage which appears in the history that he wrote in 1267 was brought to scholarly attention by Aurel Decei, who used Edouard Dulaurier's old edition (*Recueil des historiens des Croisades, publié par les soins de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. Documents arméniens*, tome I, Paris, 1869). A new English translation, based on comparisons between several manuscripts, is now available.<sup>49</sup>

45 Brial, *Recueil*, 525–533; PL, vol. 215, 706–710; FLHB IV, 11–23; Tafel, *Urkunden*, 11, 37–42).

46 For these sources see Podskalsky 2000, 356–376.

47 The fragment is quoted and translated in Decei 1978, 195; Ciocîltan 1992, 111–116; Korobeinikov 2008, 394–395.

48 Ciocîltan 1992, 117–119; Korobeinikov 2008, 387.

49 Decei 1978, 92–93; Thomson 1989, 210.

## The Historiography<sup>1</sup>

Mauro Orbini, a Benedictine monk from Ragusa, was the first author to deal with the Second Bulgarian Empire. His main idea was that the Slavs represented the most important European race. He developed the Pan-Slavic concept, first mentioned by the Dominican monk Vinko Pribojević, in his *Oratio de origini successibusque Slavorum* (1525). In that work, he identified the Illyrians with the Slavs, believed to be the indigenous people in the Balkan Peninsula. Pribojević had forged a document supposedly discovered in Constantinople in which Alexander the Great expressed his gratitude towards the Slavic people.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Orbini is the first historian to have deliberately distorted facts and information, taken from Niketas Choniates, in order to fit them into his Pan-Slavic view. He wrote about the Bulgarian rebellion led by Peter and Asan, but described them as “barons of Bulgaria” (*baroni di Bulgaria*). The Vlachs are mentioned only as a population living on the other side of the Danube, whom the Bulgarians asked for help. In other words, Orbini called Vlachs those whom Niketas Choniates had called Scythians (Cumans). The Vlachs in fact replace the Cumans in the passages concerning the battle of Adrianople that took place on April 14, 1205. Moreover, Orbini modified the passage in Choniates in which a priest taken prisoner speaks to Asan in the language of the Vlachs, and made the priest speak Bulgarian (*sapeva benissimo la lingua Bulgara*).<sup>3</sup> Thus, Orbini effectively excluded the Vlachs from the genesis of the Asanid state.

Dimitrie Cantemir dealt extensively with the history of the Asanid state in his *Hronicul vechimii romano-moldo-vlahilor* (*The Chronicle of the Ancestry of the Romano-Moldo-Vlachs*, 1722), but this work remained unpublished during his lifetime. Unlike the famous *History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire*, it did not influence the historiography of that period. Cantemir was familiar with Niketas Choniates, Nikephoros Gregoras and Georgios Pachymeres, but knew nothing about George Akropolites and Geoffroy de Villehardouin. His account of the events that took place between 1185 and 1205 is largely consistent with what we know today. He seems to have been motivated to reject the ideas of Mauro Orbini, whom he called a “falsifier” and

1 Other surveys of the historiography of this problem at Bănescu 1943; Malingoudis 1978, 123–129; Tanaşoca 1989; Lazăr 2005; Daskalov 2015.

2 Madgearu 2008, 155; Fine 2009, 223–229.

3 Orbini 1601, 444–445, 452, 458.

“the shame of historians.” Besides proving the Roman origin and the continuity of the Romanian people in Dacia, one of the merits of *Hronicul* is the fact that it dealt, for the first time in Romanian historiography, with the Vlachs in the Balkans. Cantemir believed that the Asanid state ruled over the lands north of the Danube until the Mongol invasion. He also claimed that the members of the Asan boyar family, who settled much later in Moldavia, were descendents of the famous dynasty. One major error is the confusion between Johannitsa and the usurper Ivanko, who killed Asan in 1196.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Lebeau gave to the world the first general history of the Byzantine Empire, *Histoire du Bas Empire commençant à Constantin le Grand*, published between 1757 and 1786. His work represented a great accomplishment for that time. Lebeau based his work on sources edited in Paris between the years 1648 and 1711 as part of the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* series. He also wrote about the conflicts with the Asanid state. This monumental work remained influential for a long time in French and European historiography. His history of the Byzantine Empire thus brought to the fore “les Valaques et les Bulgares” (“the Vlachs and the Bulgars”) as founders of the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>5</sup> Equally influential was the work of Claude-Charles de Peyssonnel, the French envoy to the Crimean Khanate in 1754–1758. Having a good knowledge of Byzantine sources, Peyssonnel achieved a work of great erudition, in which he presented the history of the Byzantine Empire and of the barbarian populations that attacked it. The final two chapters are dedicated to the Romanians living north and to the Vlachs living south of the Danube. Based primarily on Niketas Choniates, the author highlighted the Vlach origin of Peter and Asan, the leaders of the rebellion that led to the independence of Bulgaria and Vlachia, and gave many details about the conflicts with the Byzantine and Latin Empire until 1206.<sup>6</sup>

Edward Gibbon’s monumental work from 1776 is (in)famously responsible for the depiction Byzantine history as one of continuous decline. Regarding the Asanid state, he wrote:

The honour of the monarchy and the safety of the capital were deeply wounded by the revolt of the Bulgars and Wallachians. Since the victory of the second Basil, they had supported, above an hundred and seventy years, the loose dominion of the Byzantine princes. (...) Peter and Asan,

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4 Cantemir 1901, 397–434.

5 Lebeau 1820, 315–321, 328–329, 366–371, 381–384, 400–410, 418–420.

6 Peyssonnel 1765, 192–208.

two powerful chiefs, of the race of the ancient kings, asserted their own rights and the national freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout his book, which was the first serious attempt to explain the origin of the Romanians and Albanians, the German linguist Johann Thunmann emphasized the Romanian (Vlach) origin of the brothers Peter and Asan.<sup>8</sup>

Paisij, a Bulgarian monk from the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos, wrote the *Istorija slovenobălgarskaja* in 1762. The work survives in 50 copies, but the original manuscript has disappeared. The first partial edition entitled *Tzarstvenik* appeared in Buda in 1844. The full text was put together in 1914 by Jordan Ivanov. Paisij was a precursor of the Bulgarian national revival movement. In the words of the Romanian Slavist Ioan Bogdan, Paisij

started to write the history of his people, because of the Serbian and Greek mockeries to which he was exposed. He wanted to revive the glorious past of the Bulgarian people, who had decayed so severely in his time, that they had forgotten their own history. (...) Unfortunately, he was not prepared for that mission. He had to settle for writing a compilation using second- or third-rate sources and, because he was lacking superior culture, he had to use these sources without applying any critical reasoning.<sup>9</sup>

The sections on Antiquity and the Middle Ages are fanciful and based on Mauro Orbini's Pan-Slavic point of view, which Paisij knew from a Russian translation made during the reign of Peter the Great. Paisij argued that the Bulgarians had settled the lands around the Danube during the reign of Emperor Valens (378), who allowed them to take those lands in order to fight against Goths and Avars (!). Even accounts of later events are filled with confusions. For example, Nikephor Ouranos, a general under Basil II, is considered to be emperor. The information concerning the Asanids in Paisij's history must therefore be regarded with great caution. However, his work is of great significance because it is partially based on certain oral traditions. Paisij, for example, believed that Asan, the founder of the new state, came from Wallachia located north of the Danube, where his ancestors had once taken refuge. The legend, although not precise, seems to have captured the fact that the Romanians were indeed involved, to some degree, in the rebuilding of the tsardom, but

7 Gibbon 1907, x, 338.

8 Thunmann 1774, 355.

9 Bogdan 1889a, 300.

as an auxiliary and external element. The boyars of this Wallachia supposedly helped Asan with an army. Paisij mentions twice the existence of two lands named Wallachia ruled by Asan, but he does not seem to have been aware of Vlachs living amongst Bulgarians south of the Danube.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after Paisij wrote his *History*, Transylvanian Greek-Catholic scholars laid the foundations of the modern Romanian historiography. The most notable historian of the Transylvanian School, Gheorghe Șincai (1754–1816), is responsible for the equation between Vlachs and Romanians. According to Șincai, Samuel, the Bulgarian leader who in 976 rebuilt the First Bulgarian Empire and fought a long war against Basil II, came from a Romanian family, since “Romanians were united with Bulgarians” in that state, in which “the reign shifted from Bulgarians to Romanians.” Șincai believed that the three brothers—Peter, Asan and Johannitsa—were descendants of Samuel. Having an in-depth knowledge of Byzantine sources, as well of the documents pertaining to Pope Innocent III, he described at length the history of “the Romanian rebellion against the Greeks” and of the Asanid state, based on the histories of Niketas Choniates, George Akropolites and Pseudo-Kodinos.<sup>11</sup> Șincai finished the *Chronicle of the Romanians and of other peoples* in 1811, but the first edition including the information about the Asanids appeared only in 1844 at Buda (the first complete edition appeared in Iași, in 1854). In 1812, Petru Maior (1756–1821) provided a clearer account of the history of the Asanids. In contrast to Șincai, Maior knew nothing about Johannitsa’s relations with Pope Innocent III.<sup>12</sup> Both Transylvanian historians mistook the Cuman allies for the Romanians living north of the Danube.

Meanwhile, the Greek scholar Daniel Philippide published in 1816 in Leipzig the first history of the Romanian people using the name *Romania* (Ρουμανία) for the region between the Danube, the Dniester and the Tisza rivers. This was, in fact, the first comprehensive book about Romanian history published in a language known to Western scholars. Because of his focus on the lands north of the river Danube, Philippide did not deal with the Asanid state, but mentioned “Romanian looters” crossing the Danube together with the Cumans to attack Thrace during the reign of Isaac II Angelos.<sup>13</sup> Another Greek history of the Romanian principalities was published in 1818 in Vienna by Dionysios Fotino. Fotino’s work, unlike Philippide’s, includes a fairly detailed account of

10 Paisij, 58–99. For Orbini as a source, see Dell’Agata 1989, 9–18.

11 Șincai 1967, 282–283, 288–289, 342–380, 384–385, 393–394, 398, 400–404, 406, 409–410, 419–423.

12 Maior 1971, 24–43.

13 Philippide 2004, 297–298.

the history of the state founded by the “two Romanian brothers, Peter and Asan, who lived near Mount Haemus.” Fotino was the first to suggest that the name of the Romanian city Craiova derived from that of King John (“Crai Ivan”), in reference to John (Ivan) Asan II, who had supposedly founded the church of Saint Demetrios in Craiova.<sup>14</sup> This theory was later rejected by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu.<sup>15</sup> In his 1837 book, Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) also introduced a brief history of the Asanid state, based on Şincai’s manuscript and Petru Maior’s writings.<sup>16</sup> August Treboniu Laurian (1810–1881), in the historical introduction to his work on the Latin origin of the Romanian language, also wrote about the state created by Peter and Asan, and reproduced Pope Innocent III’s letters to Johannitsa.<sup>17</sup> Worth mentioning in this context is an article that Alexandru Odobescu (1834–1895) published in 1861 in *Revista Română*, providing a summary of the history of what he believed to have been a Romanian-Bulgarian state.<sup>18</sup>

In 1854, George Finlay (1799–1875) published the first history of Greece in English, and in that book he placed a great emphasis on the history of Byzantium. Before relating the military confrontations with the Asanid state, which started with “the great rebellion of the Vallachian and Bulgarian population which occupied the country between Mount Haemus and the Danube,” Finlay gave a clear and correct presentation of the early history of the Vlachs, largely based on Thunmann. Given the prestige that Finlay’s work enjoyed for a long time in the English-speaking part of the world, it is appropriate to quote him directly:

A new European monarchy, called the Vallachian, or second Bulgarian kingdom, was formed, which for some time acted an important part in the affairs of the Byzantine Empire, and contributed powerfully to the depression of the Greek race. The sudden importance assumed by the Vallachian population in this revolution, and the great extent of country then occupied by a people who had previously acted no prominent part in the political events of the East, render it necessary to give some account of their previous history. (...) Three brothers, Peter, Asan, and John, placed themselves at the head of the insurrection, and claimed to

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14 Fotino 1859, 125–129.

15 Hasdeu 1878, 1–5.

16 Kogălniceanu 1946, 97–106.

17 Laurian 1840, XXIII–XXXIX.

18 Odobescu 1880, 96 (Sergiu Iosipescu informed me about this article).

be descended from the elder line of the Bulgarian monarchs, though they were Vallachians in their nurture.<sup>19</sup>

Less than 20 years later, Eduard Robert Roesler (1836–1874) published his *Romänische Studien* (“Romanian Studies”) in Leipzig. In this book, he presented the theory, which is now associated with his name, and according to which the Romanians had come to the lands north of the river Danube from the Balkans. While much of the debate concerning the Romanian continuity is beyond the scope of this book, it is worth mentioning that Roesler correctly showed that the Vlachs in medieval Bulgaria were the descendents of the Romanized population of Moesia. In order to explain how the Vlachs became Romanians, Roesler argued that the former migrated to the lands north to the Danube during the 13th century, because Oltenia and Wallachia (the southern parts of present-day Romania) belonged at that time to the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>20</sup>

The first Romanian rebuttal of Roesler’s theory regarding the Romanian continuity came from Alexandru D. Xenopol (1847–1920), first in a critical study (*Teoria lui Rösler: studii asupra stăruinței românilor în Dacia Traiană*, Iași, 1884), and then in his *History of the Romanians in Trajan’s Dacia (Istoria Românilor în Dacia Traiană)* (first volume published in 1888).<sup>21</sup> In both works, Xenopol paid considerable attention to the history of the Asanids. However, he also dedicated a special study to that history, which was published in *Revue historique* in 1891, and later became a chapter in the later volumes of his *History of the Romanians in Trajan’s Dacia*. Xenopol’s main concern was to prove that founders of the Second Bulgarian Empire were of Romanian origin, and he cited both Byzantine and Western sources in support of that idea.<sup>22</sup> Xenopol’s 1884 study in turn prompted a thorough rebuttal from Dimitre Onciul (1856–1923), who also wrote several studies dedicated to the Asanid state, especially to the problem of its alleged rule over the lands north of the Danube. In order to reject Roesler’s main argument for the migration of the Vlachs to the lands north of the Danube, Xenopol denied that the Second Bulgarian Empire had ruled over Wallachia and Oltenia. By contrast, Onciul not only embraced the idea that the Asanids ruled over the lands north of the river Danube until the

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19 Finlay 1877, 224, 230.

20 Roesler 1871, 110–119.

21 Xenopol 1925, 231–256.

22 Xenopol 1891.



Mongol invasion of 1241–1242, but even saw the Second Bulgarian Empire as the catalyst in the early state formation in Oltenia and Wallachia.<sup>23</sup>

In his travelogue, the French Hellenist Victor Bérard (1864–1931) noted that the Vlachs, together with the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians, had historical rights over Macedonia. Although not a medievalist, Bérard was a skilled diplomat, and in that capacity made an astute comment upon the faith the Asanid rulers, which no other historian had made until then:

At the very beginning of this empire, King Peter separated his church from the Byzantine patriarchs and put it under papal jurisdiction. The Latin Empire would have found staunch allies in those Catholic Latins and Romanity would have perhaps triumphed for ever in the Balkans, had Baldwin and his successors been capable of understanding how useful the Vlach alliance actually was. But the Latin emperor claimed the entire Byzantine legacy, so he continued Isaac's wars against the Vlach-Bulgarians, whom he regarded as rebel subjects. Unfortunately, that did not work too well for him.<sup>24</sup>

There are at least two important ideas in this comment: first, that the policies of the Latin Empire were a continuation of those of Byzantium, and second, the counterfactual observation of what would have happened if the Latin and the Second Bulgarian empires would have been allies.

The first history of Bulgaria was written by a Czech, Konstantin Josef Jireček (1854–1918), who served in the government of the principality of Bulgaria between 1879 and 1884. The history of the Second Bulgarian Empire was of course of outmost significance to Jireček. His was in fact the first detailed account of the entire period between 1185 and 1280, during which the Asanid dynasty ruled over Bulgaria.<sup>25</sup> Jireček, however, was the first modern historian

23 Onciul 1968, I, 224–226 (*Teoria lui Roesler. Studii asupra stăruinței românilor în Dacia Traiană, de A. D. Xenopol. Dare de seamă*), 400–421 (*Radul Negrul și originile principatului Țării Românești*), 455–458 (*Asăneștii*), 599–627 (*Originile principatelor române*); II, 43–69 (*Banatul Severinului*).

24 Bérard 1893, 246: “Au début même de cet Empire, le roi Pierre sépare son Église des Patriarches byzantins et la soumet à la papauté romaine. L'Empire latin eût trouvé des alliés dans ces Latins catholiques, et la romanité eût peut-être triomphé pour toujours dans la péninsule des Balkans, si Baudouin et ses successeurs avaient compris l'utilité de l'alliance valaque. Mais l'Empereur latin prétendait à tout l'héritage du Byzantinisme; il continua les guerres d'Isaac contre les Vlacho-Bulgares, qu'il appelait ses sujets révoltés; au reste il fut malheureux . . .”

25 Jireček 1876, 223–284.

to write the Vlachs out of the history of the Second Bulgarian Empire. He did so either by distorting or by omitting information from the sources. The main reasons for this overemphasis on ethnicity were directly tied to the political interests of that time, especially with the rise of Balkan nationalisms. During the last quarter of the 19th century, the Second Bulgarian Empire was becoming a key element in the historiographic debates surrounding both the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the successor states, particularly Bulgaria. While Roesler wanted the Balkan Vlachs to move to the lands north of the river Danube in order to become Romanians, Jireček did not want any Vlachs at all, since an ethnically pure Bulgarian history was crucial to his arguments. The Russian Byzantinist Feodor I. Uspenskij (1845–1928) went even farther. He claimed that 12th- to 13th-century Byzantine authors deliberately and abusively called the Bulgarians Vlachs, in order to justify the Byzantine domination over the former Bulgarian lands (calling the inhabitants of those lands Vlachs implied that they were not the native population). Uspenskij also believed that Pope Innocent III invented the Romanian origin of the Asan dynasty in order to convince Johannitsa to convert to Catholicism.<sup>26</sup> The view of another Russian Byzantinist, Vasili G. Vasilievskij (1838–1899) was more moderate, as he admitted the participation of the Vlachs in the rebellion and in the creation of the state. He regarded Peter and Asan as Bulgarians raised in a Romanian environment.<sup>27</sup>

The first rebuttal of such tendentious interpretations came from the German historian Konstantin von Höfler (1811–1898). He argued that the Vlachs were the real founders of the Second Bulgarian Empire, and cited Old French and Byzantine sources in support of his contention: “The Empire was Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman, but the dynasty was Vlach.”<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, in Romania, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1857–1907) dealt with the Asanids in an article published in the second of his *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, which appeared in 1890. Hasdeu believed the Asanids to be of Romanian origin, and like Cantemir, he regarded them as ancestors of the Moldavian boyar family named Asan. However, he is the first to have suggested that the name itself was of Cuman, not Romanian origin.<sup>29</sup> Hasdeu rejected Onciul’s ideas about the rule of the Second Bulgarian Empire over the lands north of the river Danube. Instead, he correctly pointed out that those lands were under Cuman rule, and

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26 Uspenskij 1879.

27 Vasilievskij 1880.

28 Höfler 1879, 245: “Das Reich war wlachisch-bulgarisch-cumanisch, die Dynastie aber wlachisch.”

29 Hasdeu 1974.

commented upon the Cuman kings Ionas and Saronios (see chapter 8), first in his work on the origins of Craiova, and then in his study on Negru Vodă.<sup>30</sup> The Romanian Hellenist George Murnu (1868–1957), an Aromanian by origin, first translated into Romanian those parts of the *History* of Niketas Choniates that refer to the Asanids. He also wrote several studies about the Vlachs, particularly those of Thessaly and Epirus.<sup>31</sup> Constantin Erbiceanu (1838–1913), a professor of Classics, also translated several passages from key Byzantine sources about the Asanids (the history of Niketas Choniates, his 1187 and 1190 speeches, the history of George Akropolites). He believed that the “Vlach rebellion for independence in the Balkan Peninsula under the Asanids was initially led only by Vlach chiefs who were eventually joined by Bulgarians, creating the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire.”<sup>32</sup>

Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) first approached the Asanid question in his *History of the Romanians* published in Germany in 1905, but without insisting too much on political and military developments.<sup>33</sup> Next, he wrote one of the most interesting studies on South-East European history on the occasion of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). Here, Iorga gave his first broad account of the creation and evolution of the Asanid state. He disputed Onciul’s idea of an Asanid expansion into the lands north of the river Danube, but without developing the argument.<sup>34</sup> Surprisingly, in another study published in 1916 and dedicated to the creation of the medieval Balkan states, the Asanid rebellion and the creation of the new state are barely mentioned.<sup>35</sup> In a brief history of the Vlachs (whom Iorga regarded as Balkan Romanians) published while the peace treaties were being negotiated after World War I, Iorga argued that Peter and Asan’s rebellion started in the Pindus, not Stara Planina area, and he identified Tyrnavon mentioned by Niketas Choniates not with Tărnovo in Bulgaria, but with a city in Thessaly (an erroneous identification repeated in the 1937 great synthesis of Romanian history).<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting in this context that Isidor Ieșan, author of an almost forgotten book identified Tărnovo with Tyrnova near Bitolia, in Macedonia. As a consequence, much like Iorga,

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30 Hasdeu 1976, 692–705.

31 Murnu 1906; Murnu 1913; Murnu 1938. The author prepared himself a final edition of some of his works, published by Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca (Murnu 1984).

32 Erbiceanu 1901.

33 Iorga 1905, 95–99.

34 Iorga 1913, 82–89.

35 Iorga 1916, 218.

36 Iorga 1919, 13–17; Iorga 1937, 104–111.

Ieşan believed that the Vlachs mentioned by Choniates were the Aromanians from the Pindus Mountains.<sup>37</sup>

During and shortly after World War I, the question of the Asanids was also tackled by Bulgarian historians. Especially notable in this respect is the first volume of Vasil Zlatarski's *History of the Bulgarians* (*Geschichte der Bulgaren. Von der Gründung des bulgarischen Reiches bis zur Türkenzeit (679–1396)*), published in Leipzig in 1918 (the extended version, in Bulgarian, was published in three volumes, of which the third appeared in 1940 and covers the years 1187–1290). Zlatarski's disciple Petăr Mutafčiev (1883–1943) wrote an aggressively polemic study,<sup>38</sup> in which he attacked the interpretation of Romanian historians, especially of Iorga. The response was given by Petre P. Panaitescu (1900–1967), who was at that time at the beginning of his great career as a Slavist. The dispute between the two historians included, among other issues, the role of Romanians (Vlachs) in the genesis and development of the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>39</sup> Panaitescu dealt with the history of the Asanids in further studies.<sup>40</sup> Another Romanian historian from that same generation, Constantin C. Giurescu (1901–1977), located the Haemus Mountains as the area where the rebellion had started, thus clarifying an intricate issue. He briefly covered the history of the Asanid state in his *History of the Romanians*, first published in 1935.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1904–1976) offered some interesting insights concerning the story of William de Rubruck's mission and highlighted the importance of the information regarding the Asanid state.<sup>42</sup> Aurel Decei (1905–1976), who investigated passages about Romanians in Armenian sources, also found one about Vlachs and the participants in the Third Crusade. He also commented upon the information from Western sources related to the same issue.<sup>43</sup>

Iorga's disciple, Nicolae Bănescu (1878–1971), also engaged in the debate with the Bulgarian historians and rejected Zlatarski and Mutafčiev's exaggerations.<sup>44</sup> Even though Gheorghe Brătianu (1898–1953) did not dedicate any significant part of his work to the history of the Asanids, his contribution is essential for

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37 Ieşan 1912, 259.

38 Mutafčiev 1932.

39 Panaitescu 1929, 23–24. For the entire polemic occasioned by the works of Zlatarski and Mutafčiev, see Daskalov 2015, 277–316.

40 Panaitescu 1944, 17–23; Panaitescu 1969, 216–224.

41 Giurescu 1931; Giurescu 1946, 325–333.

42 Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 66–69, 90–111.

43 Decei 1978, 92–95.

44 Bănescu 1943; Bănescu 1947, 281–291.

its understanding. In his 1945 book, *Tradiția istorică despre întemeierea statelor românești* (*The historical tradition regarding the establishment of the medieval Romanian principalities*), a chapter is entirely dedicated to the Asanids, whose subjects were “on militarily, politically and culturally equal footing with most nations in the age of feudal Europe.” Writing in times of distress, the historian and politician Gheorghe Brătianu concluded that “our neighbors to the south [Bulgarian historians, A.M.] are, however, wrong when interpreting our legitimate tendency to claim, in the name of the historical truth, a past which belongs to us—or at least to a branch of our people—as some expansionist plans of an alleged Romanian imperialism towards the Balkan Peninsula.” Brătianu also referred briefly to the Asanid state in a study on the rise of the medieval states in the Romanian lands. He wrote that study in 1949, when placed under house arrest by the Communist regime. As a consequence, the study was published only posthumously, first in 1975 and ten again in 1993.<sup>45</sup>

During the first years of the communist regime, in Romania there were no concerns related to the history of the Asanid state. Meanwhile, however, nationalistic ideas otherwise condemned for being “bourgeois” persisted in Communist Bulgaria. A change of attitude in Romania took place only in the 1960s, as Romanian historians were encouraged to reconnect with national values. The ice was broken by means of few pages in the treatise of Romanian history published by the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic in 1962. On those pages, the Second Bulgarian Empire was viewed as the result of the revolt of both Vlachs and Bulgarians, led by the boyars Peter and Asan from Târnovo, and with the assistance of Romanians north of the Danube, as well as of Cumans. The authors of those brief remarks were Eugen Stănescu and Ștefan Pascu.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the exiled Greek-Catholic canonist and historian Aloisie Ludovic Tăutu (1895–1981), who had studied in the Vatican archives, wrote about Johannitsa's conversion to Catholicism and the relations of the Second Bulgarian Empire with Hungary.<sup>47</sup> In exile in Italy was also the philologist Petru Iroaie (1907–1984), who wrote three brief studies about the Second Bulgarian Empire under Johannitsa.<sup>48</sup>

It was not by accident that the new course of Romanian politics was also reflected in a renewed interest for the history of the Asanids, which has been a constant concern of the national historiography before 1945. Ștefan Ștefănescu

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45 Brătianu 1980, 51–83 (first edition Bucurest, 1945); Brătianu 1993, 365–366.

46 Stănescu, Pascu 1962, 12, 110–111.

47 Tăutu 1975, 195–240 (the second study appeared in 1964).

48 Iroaie 1967, 91–117.

(b. 1929), who, although educated in Moscow, was one of the leading historians involved in the new nationalist trend, published in 1965 a study cautiously entitled “Romanian-Bulgarian relations in the first half of the 13th century.” He started from the Marxist interpretation of the Second Bulgarian Empire advanced by the Soviet Byzantinist Gennadij G. Litavrin, who, in a conspicuously presentist approach, laid emphasis on the common interests of the Romanian and Bulgarian peoples engaged in class struggle against Byzantine imperialism. Following Onciul, Ștefănescu highlighted the Vlach (according to him, “Romanian”) participation in the creation of the empire, as well as the empire’s influence upon the rise of the medieval states in the north of the river Danube.<sup>49</sup>

Two volumes were published in 1971 in Romania, a crucial year for the historiography of the Asanid state. *Relații româno-bulgare de-a lungul veacurilor* (Romanian-Bulgarian relations across the ages) was published by the Institute for Southeast-European Studies, in cooperation with some Bulgarian historians. The leading scholar among the latter was Borislav Primov (1918–1984), who unlike Zlatarski and Mutafčiev, adopted a moderate attitude:

Today we can however observe that historians from neighboring and friendly countries have overcome a number of methodological and ideological shortcomings regarding Bulgarian-Romanian relations in the past. Both sides are today convinced that new explanations and interpretations are needed. In this spirit, this paper aims to contribute to a fairer treatment of the creation of the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>50</sup>

Primov’s moderate attitude had no followers, as Bulgarian historians continued to deny any Vlach (understood by now as “Romanian”) contribution to the rise of the Second Bulgarian Empire. Another study from the same volume, written by Dimităr Angelov and Ștefan Ștefănescu, was concerned with economic and social issues.<sup>51</sup> The latter wrote an entire chapter about the Asanid state for the third volume of *Din istoria Dobrogei* (From the History of Dobrudja), which was also published in 1971.<sup>52</sup> In that same year, the 14th International Congress on Byzantine Studies took place in Bucharest, and following that event, an entirely new generation of historians, who were able to establish contacts with the Western academic environment, produced several studies dedicated to the

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49 Ștefănescu 1965.

50 Primov 1971, 12.

51 Angelov, Ștefănescu 1971, 57–106.

52 Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 339–346.

Asanid state: Stelian Brezeanu,<sup>53</sup> Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca,<sup>54</sup> Tudor Teoteoi,<sup>55</sup> Radu Ștefan Ciobanu (Vergatti),<sup>56</sup> Victor Spinei,<sup>57</sup> Sergiu Iosipescu,<sup>58</sup> and Adolf Armbruster.<sup>59</sup> Petre Diaconu, the most respected Romanian specialist in the history of medieval Dobruđa, dealt extensively with the Asanids state in his book about the Cumans.<sup>60</sup> In the last year of the Communist regime, the Institute for Southeast-European Studies published the first and only volume dedicated entirely to this issue: *Răscoala și statul Asăneștilor* (The rebellion and the state of the Assanids). In their studies included in the volume, Eugen Stănescu, Stelian Brezeanu, Tudor Teoteoi, Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, Octavian Iliescu, and Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu addressed various aspects of political, military, economic and social history, as well as the ideology of power. It is worth noting that Eugen Stănescu's study is based on his talk delivered at the 15th International Congress for Byzantine Studies held in Athens.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the Romanian Byzantinist in exile, Petre Ș. Năsturel published several important studies about of the Asanid state.<sup>62</sup>

In sharp contrast to Borislav Primov's 1971 study, which acknowledged the role of the Vlachs in the genesis of the state, Bulgarian historians largely ignored the evidence of the Byzantine and Western sources, or misinterpreted that information.<sup>63</sup> However, there are some noteworthy exceptions.<sup>64</sup> One of the ways in which the Vlachs were written out of the medieval history of Bulgaria was the assertion that the term "Vlach" used in the Byzantine sources did not refer to an ethnic group, but had acquired the social meaning of "shepherd" or "pastoralist." This, however, directly contradicts Uspenskij's idea (which was embraced by Bulgarian historians as well) that Pope Innocent III called Johannitsa *Blacus* only to convince him to convert to the Church of Rome. If one accepts Uspenskij's idea, one has to admit that that for the pope, the term "Vlach" had an ethnic meaning. Many Bulgarian historians do not

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53 Brezeanu 1980; Brezeanu 1981; Brezeanu 1987; Brezeanu 1989a; Brezeanu 1989b.

54 Tanașoca 1981; Tanașoca 1989; Tanașoca 2003 (text redactat în 1981).

55 Teoteoi 1989.

56 Ciobanu 1976; Ciobanu 1985.

57 Spinei 1985, 80–82, 89–90.

58 Iosipescu 1984.

59 Armbruster 1993, 32–35 (first edition in 1972); Armbruster 1990, 32–33.

60 Diaconu 1978, 114–119, 130–133.

61 Stănescu 1976.

62 Năsturel 1978, 223–227, 241; Năsturel 1979, 97, 105–106; Năsturel 1996, 79–82.

63 See especially Dujčev 1952–1953, 229–230; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 102–103; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 56; Angelov 1984, 42–43.

64 Tăpkova-Zaimova 1971, 294.

seem to have been aware of this contradictions, and both interpretations may be found, a few pages away, within one and the same study of Genoveva Cankova-Petkova.<sup>65</sup> According to another idea meant to deny the Vlach participation in the rise of the Second Bulgarian Empire, the term *Blac* in the Latin sources for the Third and Fourth Crusades meant “non-Greek Orthodox,” in a pejorative sense. This idea did not gain too many supporters.<sup>66</sup>

Notwithstanding such shortcomings, the value of the studies written by Dimităr Angelov, Ivan Božilov, Genoveva Cankova-Petkova, Ani Dančeva-Vasileva, Ivan Dujčev, Krasimira Gagova, Vasil Gjuzelev, and Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova lies in the thorough analysis of political and military events, as well as of economic, social and religious aspects, which were rarely, if ever, tackled by Romanian historians. Some studies have been published in international languages. Monuments of the Second Bulgarian Empire period from Veliko Tărnovo and other cities have been researched. Alexander Kuzev, Atanas Popov and Sonia Georgieva have shown a particular interest in studying the fortifications.

The works of historians outside Romania and Bulgaria are usually indifferent to the question of the state founders' ethnic origin. The American historian Robert Lee Wolff become familiar with Balkan (medieval) history during World War II, when he was head of the research unit for the OSS intelligence service for the Balkans. He wrote a study, which although more than 60 years old, still is fundamental. To Wolff, the political dimension of the debated between Bulgarian and Romanian historians was too obvious:

I feel no sympathy for either party to the polemic, behind which, during the nineteen-twenties and thirties, there lay ill-concealed the wish to impugn or to justify, as the case might be, Rumanian possession of the southern Dobrudja. This is a matter, which western scholars would not ordinarily study with reference to mediaeval conditions. But in the Balkans mediaeval data accumulated by scholars are often regarded as providing strong arguments for the settlement of present-day controversies. For this reason the contributions of the Bulgarian and Rumanian historians must be used with great care, and the sources themselves examined afresh.<sup>67</sup>

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65 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 99, 102.

66 Koledarov 1979, 34–35.

67 Wolff 1949 (the quotation at 175).



The Second Bulgarian Empire is also briefly mentioned or discussed in works pertaining to the history of the Byzantine Empire (Alexander Vasiliev, George Ostrogorsky, Michael Angold, Warren Treadgold), the Latin Empire of Constantinople (Kenneth Setton, Antonio Carile, Benjamin Hendrickx, Filip Van Tricht), or the Third and Fourth Crusades (Steven Runciman, Jonathan Phillips). Most such works acknowledge the Vlach contribution to the rise of the Second Bulgarian Empire, primarily because of relying on Byzantine and Western sources.

Several Greek historians wrote about the Asanid state, being particularly concerned with the impact that the rebellion had on the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Some of them acknowledged the role that the Vlachs played in triggering the uprising.<sup>68</sup> Charles Brand's book about the final period before the collapse of the Byzantine Empire in 1204 pays considerable attention to the first two decades in the history of the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>69</sup> According to the French Byzantinist Jean Claude Cheynet, there can be no question that the rebellion was set off by Vlachs, and that Bulgarians rallied to it at a later time.<sup>70</sup> An American historian, John V. A. Fine Jr. wrote the most comprehensive history of the Balkan Peninsula in the Middle Ages. In the second volume, he dealt extensively with the history of the Second Bulgarian Empire and its international relations. As for the ethnicity of the rebel leaders, Fine believed that the Asan brothers were Vlachs. However,

the issue is not as important as many twentieth-century scholars think. The twelfth century was not a period of nationalism. Bulgarians and Vlachs (...) do not seem to have been in competition for land, and trade by which each obtained the other's produce surely benefited both groups. Both groups also would have suffered similar annoyances from the Byzantine authorities. Thus one would expect them to come together in common cause and would expect people from either group to follow an impressive leader who seemed likely to succeed regardless of which "race" he belonged to. There is no evidence of any "national" conflict or rivalry between these two people at this time. Thus the modern academic controversy, being over an issue of little relevance to the Middle Ages, is probably best dropped.<sup>71</sup>

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68 Vlachos 1974; Malingoudis 1978; Mavromatis 1985.

69 Brand 1968, 88–96, 105, 110–113, 125–135, 178–180, 273–274.

70 Cheynet 1990, 450.

71 Fine 1994, 10–17, 24–33, 54–56, 81–87, 91–106, 124–132, 154–156, 170–183 (citatul la 12–13).

Paul Stephenson published a valuable study on Southeastern European provinces of the Byzantine Empire, also addressing the early stages of the Asanid state.<sup>72</sup> Florin Curta, a Romanian historian living in the USA, wrote a synthesis dedicated to Southeastern Europe during the 6th to 13th centuries, granting the history of the Second Bulgarian Empire its rightful place. The study had a great international impact.<sup>73</sup>

The book written by the Hungarian Turkologist István Vásáry is a special case. Published by one of the world's most important publishing houses, Cambridge University Press, just like Stephenson and Curta's works, the book deals mainly with the impact of the Cuman and Tatar presence in the Balkan Peninsula, and their role in the creation of the states south and north of the Danube. The work is indeed a major contribution to the study of the history of Southeastern Europe and the relations between nomad and settled populations. However, it is written in a highly tendentious tone, as it subscribes to Roesler's ideas regarding the absence of any Romanian population north of the Danube before the 13th century. Its coverage of the Second Bulgarian Empire is patchy, with some interesting ideas about the Asanid state.<sup>74</sup>

Over the last decade, the Italian researcher Francesco Dall'Aglio has published a series of studies on the Second Bulgarian Empire, in which he tackled a variety of issues, from military history to relations with the papacy.<sup>75</sup>

After the demise of the Communist regime, the history of the Asanid state remained a constant concern for historians in both Romania and Bulgaria. Șerban Papacostea analyzed the international implications of the emergence and development of Second Bulgarian Empire, its relations with the papacy, Hungary and Latin Empire of Constantinople.<sup>76</sup> Lesser known Eastern sources have been brought back into question by Virgil Ciocîltan.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the treatise of Romanian history published by the Romanian Academy (a work that was prepared during the final period of the Communist regime, but published only in 2001), paid limited attention to the Second

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72 Stephenson 2000, 275–315.

73 Curta 2006, 358–365, 371–374, 379–389, 412. See also the most recent: Curta 2016.

74 Vásáry 2005, 13–66. See also the devastating critique of F. Curta, in *The Medieval Review* (<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/6063>)—06.01.02 (“a work of history that so uncritically adopts outdated theories and old ethnic stereotypes”), with the answer of the author (06.03.16) and F. Curta's reply (06.04.03).

75 Dall'Aglio 2002; Dall'Aglio 2003a; Dall'Aglio 2003b; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009; Dall'Aglio 2009; Dall'Aglio 2010; Dall'Aglio 2011a; Dall'Aglio 2011b.

76 Papacostea 1993, 11–15, 18–30, 36–48.

77 Ciocîltan 1992.

Bulgarian Empire.<sup>78</sup> Some of those historians who had published in the last two decades of the Communist regime, continued their research after 1989: Stelian Brezeanu, Sergiu Iosipescu, Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, Victor Spinei, Radu Ștefan Ciobanu (who took back his old, until then prohibited name of Vergatti). However, a new generation of historians emerged, which benefited from contacts with sources of information abroad. In this respect, it is worth noting the monographs published by Șerban Turcuș<sup>79</sup> and Viorel Achim,<sup>80</sup> as well as several studies written by Ovidiu Cristea.<sup>81</sup> Ovidiu Pecican has demonstrated a sustained interest in the history of the Asanid state. His various studies have been gathered in several volumes comprising his prolific activity in recent years.<sup>82</sup> Together with Tatiana-Ana Fluieraru, Pecican published the Romanian translations of the chronicles of Geoffroy de Villehardouin and Robert de Clari. The Greek-Catholic archimandrite Ioan Mălinaș published the Romanian translation of the correspondence of Pope Innocent III with Johannitsa and with archbishop Basil of Bulgaria.<sup>83</sup> The political and military history of the Asanid state was also the subject of many studies published by Vasile Mărculeț.<sup>84</sup> More recently, Ginel Lazăr has also focused on the political, military and religious history of the Asanid state.<sup>85</sup>

In Bulgaria, most historians educated in the post-Communist era (Khristo Dimitrov, Ivan Biliarsky, Georgi Nikolov<sup>86</sup>) had no interest in the question of the ethnic origin of the Asanids, and avoided the tendentious approach of the previous generation. They focused instead on social, political and economic history. However, some historians of the older generation (Ivan Božilov, Krasimira Gagova, Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova<sup>87</sup>) continued to publish in the same old vein, and typically ignored the Vlach contribution to Bulgarian history. For example, Božilov was invited to write for the third volume of a history of Byzantium published in Paris. His chapter on the Second Bulgarian Empire

78 Diaconu, Ștefănescu 2001, 427–438.

79 Turcuș 2001, 181–186, 301–302.

80 Achim 2008, 38–43, 47, 52, 68, 76–92, 103–104, 108–109, 122–124, 135–154, 164–169, 201–206.

81 Cristea 2002; Cristea 2010, 389–390.

82 Pecican 2002, 39–60, 73–81; Pecican 2009, 144, 268–274; Pecican 2010, 39–125, 168–191.

83 Mălinaș 2000.

84 Mărculeț 1998; Mărculeț 2004; Mărculeț 2008; Mărculeț 2009a–b; Mărculeț 2010a–c; Mărculeț 2013.

85 Lazăr 2004–2006; Lazăr 2005; Lazăr 2006; Lazăr, Murat 2007; Lazăr 2009; Lazăr 2010; Lazăr 2011.

86 Dimitrov 1997; Biliarsky 1999; Biliarsky 2011; Nikolov 2007; Nikolov 2012, Nikolov 2013.

87 Gagova 1998; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2003; Gagova 2005; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2007; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2008.

contains no mention of Vlachs.<sup>88</sup> However, in his chapter in the second volume of the same history, Jean Claude Cheynet clearly mentions both Bulgarian and Vlach rebels.<sup>89</sup> Rumen Daskalov's recent study is the result of a much needed effort to dissect the political background of the disputes between Bulgarian and Romanian historians about the Asanids and other controversial issues.<sup>90</sup> Alicia Simpson, reviewing the latest contributions (including my previous book), concluded that "these new readings suggest that something more substantial than centrifugal trends resulting from imperial weakness was behind the successful rebellion of the Vlach-Bulgarians. This fits well with the current interest in the process of state formation during the Middle Ages and can also be observed in the case of Serbia, which sought to gain its independence from the empire in roughly the same period. (...) All the Serbs, the Vlachs, and the Bulgarians required was the opportune moment to break free from the empire and an alternative centre of political power to legitimize their independence. In the late twelfth century, this alternative center was the papacy, the crown-giving institution of the West, which, unlike Byzantium, did not derive any claims of political overlordship in the act of king-making".<sup>91</sup>

A brief history of Bulgaria aimed for the general public was written by two Bulgarian historians and a Romanian historian. The part concerning the Asanid state strictly reflects the Bulgarian "official" position, against which the publisher (Corint Publishing House) felt the need to add an explanatory note.<sup>92</sup>

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88 Božilov 2011.

89 Cheynet 2006, 469.

90 Daskalov 2015.

91 Simpson 2015, 20–21

92 Pavlov, Ianev, Cain 2002, 45–61.

## A Short View on Byzantium in the Years before the Uprising of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians

If one can at all speak of an evolution toward feudalism in the Byzantine Empire (a question of no consequence for the topic of this book), then the beginning of that social phenomenon dates back to the Comnenian dynasty. The percentage of the paid military men (native Byzantines or foreigners) serving on a permanent basis increased in the Byzantine army during the second half of the 10th century. Since the reign of Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944), such troops, always ready for battle, appear more suitable to an offensive strategy than the peasant-soldiers (*stratiotai*).<sup>1</sup> It was with this type of army, combining permanent elite forces (*tagmata*) with the *stratiotai* recruited from the themes (provinces) that Basil II won his wars. Maintaining such an army implied, nevertheless, a great financial effort, and the wasteful spending made by the following emperors drastically reduced the military budget. The solution was found by Alexios I Comnenos (1081–1118), who began granting tenure lands, called *pronoia*, worked by peasants called *paroikoi*. Holders of these lands were under obligation to provide recruits to the army. This development occurred amid the propagation of great landed estates owned by *dynatoi* (“the powerful”), the local aristocracy that held civil, military or religious positions. *Pronoia* lands, such as granted especially during the reign of Manuel I Comnenos (1143–1180) were in some ways similar to Western fiefs, but no pyramid of vassals developed in Byzantium (what we call aristocracy was not identical with the Western nobility, because it was defined exclusively by rank and office in the state). The sole “lord” was the emperor, and all *pronoians* were his direct “vassals” (the terms “lord” and “vassal” can only be artificially applied in this context, as they strictly apply to West European social phenomena). On the other hand, the emergence of such local, permanent fighting forces commanded by the *pronoians* contributed to the development of the forts in which they were garrisoned.<sup>2</sup> The immediate effect was the consolidation of

1 Magdalino 1997, 18–26; Cheynet 2006, 156–159.

2 Angold 1984, 225–227; Magdalino 1993, 176, 231–233; Birkenmeier 2002, 148–156, 164–168; Cheynet 2006, 133–134, 170–171; Murdzhev 2011, 68–70. Recently, Mark Bartusis has published a large monograph about *pronoia*, which brings many clarifications on the history of this institution in the Byzantine society (Bartusis 2013). See also Simpson 2015, 32–34.

the empire's military capacity, but the introduction of the *pronoia* also led to a competition between the army and productive activities for able men, a fact which hindered the economic growth initiated in the 11th century.<sup>3</sup>

Peasants in particular chose to join the army, as the military profession had begun to be attractive. Their training, however, left a lot to be desired. Niketas Choniates wrote that people in charge of taking care of horses or of manufacturing bricks used to bribe recruitment officers so as to be registered in the recruitment rolls.<sup>4</sup> There were, however, some *pronoïars* who were professional warriors, such as the Pecheneg and Cumans prisoners of war settled on *pronoia* lands.<sup>5</sup> They were different from the men recruited from among local civilians because of their military experience and training that was specific to nomadic horsemen. The introduction of the *pronoia* system led to the creation of an army for which the state spent less for recruitment and mobilization, transferring some of those costs to land holders. However, the increase in the number of *pronoia* soldiers meant less state contributors, which, after a while, had negative side-effects on the budget available for the better trained, permanent army of paid men (*tagmata*). The negative effects became obvious during Manuel I's reign, whose expensive wars drained the treasury. Manuel was eminently a warrior, who, like a Western nobleman, participated in person in military actions, no matter how perilous (most memorable in this context is the raid he led in 1148 across the Danube against the Cumans with only 500 soldiers<sup>6</sup>). After the death of this valiant man, who dreamed of reclaiming the frontiers held during the reign of Basil II, the empire was left with a large army, used to campaign constantly, but no sufficient financial resources. The situation was compounded by an increasing number of tax exemptions, the *exkuseia*, which were also granted to the *pronoïars*.

The declining resources favored military rebellions, especially after 1180, each led by ambitious generals taking advantage of the dissatisfaction of the troops. The new type of army functioned effectively as long as capable emperors could steer the empire's fighting capabilities against neighbors, even though there were also a number of serious defeats, e.g., that at the hands of the Seljuk Turks at Myriokephalon (1176). In addition, the struggle for power between various members of the Comnenian family, which broke out after

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3 Angold 1984, 260.

4 Niketas Choniates, *Manuel Comnenos*, VII (ed. Van Dieten, 209; transl. Magoulias, 118–119).

5 Anastasijević, Ostrogorsky 1951, 19–29; Lemerle 1959, 276–277; Lemerle, Guillou, Svoronos, Papachryssanthou 1970, 341–345; Brüggemann 2007–2008, 61; Bartusis 2013, 50–58; Simpson 2015, 33–34.

6 Urbansky 1968, 63; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 157–160; Diaconu 1978, 78–80; Spinei 2006, 388; Madgearu 2013a, 150–151.

Manuel's death, implied a direct involvement of the military. This was already evident in the rebellion of Andronikos (Manuel's cousin) in the spring of 1182 against the dowager empress Mary of Antioch, who was acting as a regent for the underage emperor Alexios II. There followed the rebellions of John Comnenos Vatatzes (the duke of the Thracesian Theme) in the summer of 1182 and of Isaac Comnenos (the governor of Cyprus), both against Andronikos.<sup>7</sup> From an instrument for the maintenance and expansion of imperial power, the army now turned into one of its undermining factors, a transformation accelerated by the declining authority and prestige of Manuel I's successors.

While in the East the empire was losing ground to the Seljuk Turks, in Europe the situation stabilized after Manuel I's 1167 victory against Hungary. After four decades of military conflict, the Byzantine presence in the Danube region was finally reestablished.<sup>8</sup> Rivalry with Hungary in that region concerned primarily the control over the Serbs, who were perceived as a threat for the region's stability, because of the threat they posed to the imperial road from Sirmium, through Belgrade, Niš, Sofia, and Adrianople to Constantinople. Michael Angold has noted in this respect that the Serbs were a risk factor similar to that represented by the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia.<sup>9</sup>

The rise of Hungary as a regional power was stopped for the remaining years of the reign of Manuel I, who actually attempted to integrate Hungary within the empire, through the marriage of Prince Béla with his daughter Mary. The engagement was concluded in 1163. Béla was granted the title of despot and given the name of Alexios. However, when a son named Alexios was born to Manuel in 1169, Béla lost his position of potential successor to the throne. After Manuel's death on September 24th 1180, the underage Alexios became the emperor (Alexios II, 1180–1183) under the tutelage of his mother Mary, and later of Andronikos, the deceased emperor's cousin, who had always considered himself a rival of Manuel and who had now become the *de facto* ruler of the empire. Béla, who had meanwhile become King of Hungary (Béla III, 1172–1196), remained an ally of Manuel, but after his death, under the pretext

7 Brand 1968, 38–55; Angold 1984, 264–267; Treadgold 1997, 650–654; Cheynet 1990, 111–113, 116–117.

8 For the war against Hungary and the Serbian župans between 1127 and 1167, see Hóman 1940, 380–381, 389–391, 396–400; Urbansky 1968, 45–49, 52, 71–77, 80–85, 92–106; Angold 1984, 154, 174–177; Kosztolnyik 1987, 88–90, 146–150, 185–191; Makk 1989, 24–27, 48–56, 60–62, 85–92, 99–101; Fine 1991, 234–235, 237–242; Magdalino 1993, 35, 54–56, 79–83; Stephenson 2000, 206–210, 225–226, 229–237, 245–253, 259–261, 266–267; Birkenmeier 2002, 90–91, 118–121; Curta 2006, 328–334; Kostova 2008, 270–274.

9 Angold 1984, 174.

of fighting Andronikos, whom he regarded as an a usurper, he attacked the Byzantine Empire in 1182 at the request of the dowager empress Mary of Antioch. The Hungarian army first seized the region between Belgrade and Braničevo. A new campaign launched in 1183 followed up to Niš and Sofia (Sredetz). The Hungarians took the relics of St. John of Rila from Sofia; they will nonetheless be returned in 1186. During those military campaigns, Béla 111 received assistance from the grand župan Stephen Nemanja (1167–1196). During the latter's reign, Serbia had expanded from Raška into the territories under the Byzantine rule. The Serbs continued their attacks until 1185 or even up to 1187.<sup>10</sup> In the biography written by his son, Stephen, in 1216, the grand župan (who later became a monk and took the name of Symeon) is portrayed as taking advantage of the war initiated by the Hungarian king, in order to conquer or plunder numerous citadels, such as Niš, Pernik, Prizren, and Velbužd. Thus, Stephen Nemanja expanded his domination as far to the east as the valley of the Morava River and as far to the south as Prizren.<sup>11</sup>

The usurpation of Andronikos (who reigned as sole emperor between 1183 and 1185, after murdering Alexios 11 in October 1183) served as a pretext for another invasion. A pretender claiming to be Alexios 11 had received asylum in Sicily, at the court of the Norman King William 11 (1166–1189), an ambitious ruler who was contemplating the conquest of the Byzantine Empire. In the name of defending Alexios 11's alleged rights to the throne, William 11 attacked the empire on land and on sea with an army of 80,000 men. He first conquered Dyrrhachium (on June 24, 1185), and then easily marched on the *Egnatia* road to Thessaloniki, which he reached on August 6. At the same time, a fleet of 200 ships arrived under the walls of Thessaloniki on August 15. The great city was taken during the final assault on August 24. David Comnenos, who had been sent by the emperor to defend the city, fled leaving behind him the citadel with a small garrison. The conquest of Thessaloniki opened the road to Constantinople, but an army led by the general Alexios Vranas won two victories on *Via Egnatia*, at Mosynopolis (near Komotini), and then decisively, on November 7, 1185, at Dimitritsi (on the Strymon River, 15 km to the south-west

10 Hóman 1940, 432–433; Guiland 1964, 125; Hecht 1967, 39–43, 76; Urbansky 1968, 109–111, 122; Brand 1968, 47, 49; Moravcsik 1970, 89–92; Kosztolnyik 1987, 181, 186, 207–209; Makk 1989, 86–88, 97–98, 106–108, 115–118; Schmitt 1989, 26–27; Magdalino 1993, 79, 81, 92, 200; Fine 1994, 6–7; Treadgold 1997, 652–654; Stephenson 2000, 277–283; Dančeva-Vasileva 2004, 37–38; Curta 2006, 334–335; Ritter 2010, 87–88, 102–106.

11 Stephen Nemanja, 87.



from Serres and 75 km to the north from Thessaloniki). Thessaloniki was then reoccupied by the Byzantine forces, and the Norman fleet withdrew.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, confronted with the growing hostility of the aristocracy,<sup>13</sup> Andronikos was overthrown on September 12th, 1185 by Isaac Angelos, an aristocrat whom he had persecuted in the past. According to Robert de Clari, Isaac (“Kyrac”) had fled to a country named *Blakie*, when Andronikos attempted to kill him.<sup>14</sup> No such information may be found in the much better informed works of Niketas Choniates, but Ovidiu Pecican has convincingly argued that *Blakie* may have been the *Vlachia* of Thessaly<sup>15</sup> a region within the theme of Hellas, which was inhabited by Aromanians (Vlachs) and enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. A *Provincia Valachiae* was mentioned in the privilege granted to Venice in November 1188.<sup>16</sup> This may well be the the *Vlachia* mentioned later by Niketas Choniates and Georgios Akropolites.<sup>17</sup> Another reference to the Thessalian *Vlachia* comes from the travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish rabbi who visited the Byzantine Empire sometimes between 1159 and 1163, most probable in 1161. Benjamin applied the name *Vlachia* to the mountain region between the river Spercheios and the plains of Thessaly, but it remains unclear whether the mention of the Vlachs and their country is genuine, or is a later interpolation, as Florin Curta has recently suggested.<sup>18</sup> However, Robert de Clari’s information about Isaac fleeing to *Blakie* seems to have originated in some malicious rumor about Isaac, who would be defeated in his later wars against the Vlachs. Such rumors may have not been recorded

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- 12 Tafrafi 1919, 182–191; Bachmann 1935, 52–54; Zlatarski 1972, II, 430–431; Vacalopoulos 1963, 42–45; Hecht 1967, 80–86; Brand 1968, 58, 68; Vlachos 1974, 157; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 96; Malingoudis 1978, 57–58; Angold 1984, 268–272; Fine 1994, 7; Treadgold 1997, 654, 656; Stephenson 2000, 284–288; Agrigoroaei 2005; Stavridou-Zafraa 2007, 115; Ritter 2010, 7–12.
- 13 Andronikos introduced a reform of the provincial administration, removing all corrupted officials. In December 1182 he repealed Manuel’s law allowing the granting of estates from the imperial property to aristocrats alone. This was interpreted as an assault on the privileges introduced by previous Comnenian emperors (Angold 1984, 266–267, 279–280).
- 14 Robert de Clari, c. 21 (ed. Lauer, 21; transl. Fluieraru, 73).
- 15 Pecican 2010, 71–74; Idem, in Robert de Clari, transl. Fluieraru, 182–185.
- 16 Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 266; Murnu 1984, 131; Koder, Hild, Soustal 1976, 40–41; Nicol 1976, 8.
- 17 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 15 (ed. Van Dieten, 638; transl. Magoulias, 350); Akropolites, c. 25 (ed. Heisenberg, 43; transl. Macrides, 179).
- 18 *Benjamin*, II. The year was established by Jacoby 2008, who has also emphasized that “Benjamin’s original account has been shortened and edited, presumably by the author of the prologue in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century”. Curta 2016, 445–449 supposes that the description was inserted at some point during the 13th century.

by Niketas Choniates, who had a different agenda when writing the history of those years.

The new emperor, Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195), having defeated the dangerous Normans, eagerly accepted Béla III's offer of peace, which he may have regarded as being especially useful to counter the alliance between William II and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1155–1190). The king of Hungary offered his daughter Margaret in marriage to Isaac. She was only 10 years old at the time and received a new name, Mary. Her dowry consisted of the Belgrade-Niš region, which Béla had conquered during the 1183 campaign. In exchange, the emperor recognized Béla's rights over Dalmatia and the region of Sirmium (Srem). In order to defray the expenses incurred with the imperial wedding, Isaac II decided to raise the taxes.<sup>19</sup> This tax increase was that much harder to bear as during his brief reign Andronikos had taken drastic measures to curb the abuses of tax collectors. Excessive and abusive tax policies had been a characteristic of Manuel's reign, even if some cities in the Danube region may have benefitted from deductions. Andronikos apparently dismissed corrupt tax collectors and appointed honest people, instead of those offering bribes to occupy such positions (the venality of tax collectors reached its peak under Isaac II Angelos).<sup>20</sup> Michael Choniates, Archbishop of Athens, even called Andronikos the "protector of the weak and the enemy of the evildoers."<sup>21</sup> The gruesome assassination of the emperor who had championed this campaign against corruption, and the fact that the power went to another representative of the bureaucratic aristocracy may have well been instrumental in the outburst of a rebellion of peasants, shepherders and small landowners. For those people, Andronikos' cruelty and debauchery was completely irrelevant. All that they needed was an opportunity to vent older frustrations.

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19 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 368; transl. Magoulias, 203–204; FHDR III, 254/255); Zlatarski 1972, II, 433–434; Hóman 1940, 433; Guillard 1964, 125; Moravcsik 1970, 93; Vlachos 1974, 158; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 96; Angold 1984, 272; Kosztolnyik 1987, 209; Makk 1989, 120; Schmitt 1989, 27; Fine 1994, 9–10; Treadgold 1997, 657; Stephenson 2000, 283–284; Vásáry 2005, 14; Ritter 2010, 107–108.

20 Niketas Choniates, *Andronikos Comnenos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 325; transl. Magoulias, 179); Magdalino 1993, 134, 172–174; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2008, 19.

21 Michael Choniates, 142; Vasiliev 1958, 433.

## The Beginning of the Rebellion and the Rise of the Vlach-Bulgarian State (1185–1188)

Before his victory over William II (November 7th, 1185), Emperor Isaac II Angelos camped for a while at Kypsella in Thrace, now Ipsala in Turkey, 85 km to the south-west from Adrianople/Edirne. The town is located at approximately 300 km east from the battlefield of Dimitritsi. Both locations are on *Via Egnatia*.<sup>1</sup> Before the battle, the army was marching and approaching Thessaloniki from the north. As Günter Prinzing has demonstrated, the camp in Kypsella must have therefore have been before, not after the battle.<sup>2</sup>

Niketas Choniates recounts that two Vlachs named Peter and Asan arrived at the camp to see Isaac II Angelos,

requesting that they be recruited in the Roman army (συστραλογηθῆναι Ῥωμαίοις) and be awarded by imperial rescript (βασιλεία γράμματα) a certain estate (χωρίον) situated in the vicinity of Mount Haimos, which would provide them with a little revenue (πρόσοδον). Failing in their request—for the punitive action of God supersedes that of man—they grumbled because they had not been heard; and with their request made for naught, they spat out heated words, hinting at rebellion and the destruction they would wreak on their way home. Asan, the more insolent and savage of the two, was struck across the face and rebuked for his impudence at the command of John, the *sebastokrator*. Thus did they return, unsuccessful in their mission and wantonly insulted.<sup>3</sup>

Since Isaac II was preparing for battle against William II, it is clear that Peter and Asan were expecting their recruiting offer to be accepted, especially since they were most likely not alone, but accompanied by a group of Vlachs. *Basilika*

1 For Kypsella see Soustal 1991, 330–331.

2 Prinzing 1999–2000, 259. The date of setting the camp at Kypsella before the battle of Dimitritsi was previously admitted by Van Dieten 1971, 70.

3 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 369; transl. Magoulias, 204; FHDR III, 254/255); Zlatarski 1972, II, 411–413, 435–436; Wolff 1949, 182–183; Brand 1968, 89; Malingoudis 1978, 73; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 96–98; Angelov 1984, 41; Angelov 1985, 8; Fine 1994, 10–11; Stephenson 2000, 289; Curta 2006, 358–359; Ritter 2010, 32–33; Ritter 2013, 172–173.

*grammata* were letters issued by the emperor in favor of those joining the army in return for domains, thus becoming pronoiars.<sup>4</sup>

Peter and Asan were brothers (ταυτόσποροι) and from the same bloodline (ὁμογενεῖς) as the Vlachs whom Niketas Choniates blamed for the rebellion in Mount Haemus, in response to the stealing of their flocks and to their oppression. Choniates also mentions that those barbarian Vlachs used to be called Mysians (Moesians), thus acknowledging their implicit origin from the old Roman province of Moesia, in contrast to Bulgarians.<sup>5</sup> They relied on numerous fortresses (φρουρίαις) located in inaccessible areas, on steep rocks.

As already pointed out, another cause of the rebellion was the fact that the emperor was “despoiling” the people, according to Niketas, for he needed money to cover the expenses for the imperial wedding. The taxes levied for the occasion were not only for those living on the private imperial domains (τῶν οἰκείων χώρων),<sup>6</sup> but also for those in Anchialos (now Pomorie) and neighboring towns. The imperial domains in question had once belonged to the Bulgarian tsars and noblemen, before being confiscated after the conquest of Bulgaria. Their owners must have been either killed or moved to other provinces. The emperors then granted a part of those domains to Byzantine noblemen, but others remained imperial property, served by dependent peasants, *paroikoi*.<sup>7</sup> According to Paul Magdalino, Choniates quite abstruse passage implies that additional taxes have been abusively taken not only from those domains but also from Anchialos and the neighboring towns. The intention must have been to confiscate or over-tax the Vlachs’ flocks grazing in the area, instead of providing supplies from Constantinople. It appears that the Vlachs had been previously taxed only for what they bought in Anchialos, whereas the new tax (*kapnikon*) applied to their flocks. Peter and Asan represented those Vlachs.<sup>8</sup>

George Akropolites’ history clarifies some aspects of those taxes paid in kind: “Sheep, pigs, and oxen were collected from every province of the Roman empire. But since the land of the Bulgarians rears more of these than do other places, more animals were also demanded from it”. George Akropolites shows that the rebellion was set off by the fact that the authorities demanded an exaggerated number of animals from the Bulgarians, but he does not mention

4 Niketas Choniates, *Manuel Comnenos*, VII (ed. Van Dieten, 209; transl. Magoulias, 118–119); Lemerle 1959, 273; Birkenmeier 2002, 174.

5 For the use of this archaism see Brezeanu 1991, 105, 112–114.

6 For the exact meaning of the expression see Magdalino 1993, 134–135; Henty 1999, 4.

7 Litavrin 1994, 68–69.

8 Magdalino 1993, 135. The interpretation was endorsed by Stephenson 2000, 289; Ritter 2010, 30–31; Ritter 2013, 170–171.

the meeting at Kypsella, and the events are condensed in his short narration which is actually just a digression inserted in the history of Nicaea.<sup>9</sup>

Tsar Boril's *Synodikon* (Drinov's version) states that Peter's initial name was Theodore.<sup>10</sup> Some even believed that Theodore-Peter issued billon coins with the legend "Theodor B," in which B was the abbreviation of Belgun (a title confirmed for Asan, and not for Theodore-Peter), or of *Basileus* (of the *Romaiot*<sup>11</sup>). The discovery of one such coin in a hoard from Anchialos, hidden during the town's destruction in that year, strongly suggests that those coins were struck before 1190.<sup>12</sup> However, the small number of the coins discovered in Târnovo precludes the identification with Theodore-Peter. Moreover, billon coins with the legend "Theodor B" have been discovered not only in Bulgaria, but also in Asia Minor. They have most likely been struck in the name of Theodore Mankaphas, a nobleman from Philadelphia (Alaşehir), who proclaimed himself emperor in 1188, taking advantage of Isaac II's conflicts with both the Seljukid Turks, on one hand, and the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, one the other hand.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars have assumed that Theodore changed his name into Peter in reference to the Bulgarian tsar Peter I (927–969), who was canonized in the 11th century, and who was fondly remembered because of his prosperous reign.<sup>14</sup> However, it is equally plausible that the name hinted at Peter Deljan who had proclaimed himself Tsar of the Bulgarians in 1040, after the rescindment of the financial and religious privileges that Basil II had granted to the Bulgarians. Peter Deljan claimed to be the son of the tsar Gabriel Radomir (1014–1015). His rebellion spread rapidly from Belgrade to Macedonia and was suppressed only because of the rivalry between Peter Deljan and Alusian, the son of the former

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- 9 Akropolites, 11 (ed. Heisenberg, 18; transl. Macrides, 133; FHDR III, 396/397–398/399).
- 10 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 77; Zlatarski 1972, 11, 426; Butler 1996, 211; Petkov 2008, 254.
- 11 Žekova 2004, 347.
- 12 Pochitonov 1970; Pochitonov 1981; Mutafov, Kojčev, Azmanov 1995–1997; Jordanov 2001a, 91; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 44.
- 13 Henty 1969, 149; Bendall, Morrisson 1994, 170–181; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 117–118; Atanasov 1999, 126–127; Henty 1999, 392–395. The identification sustained by Dočev 1992, 40–43 (Theodore Vranas, son of Alexios Vranas, who became in 1205 the king of a small state centered in Adrianople) is contradicted by the discovery of Anchialos, concerning an earlier moment.
- 14 Guiland 1964, 129; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 105; Gjuzelev 1986, 209; Fine 1994, 10, 14; Biliarsky 2008a, 168–169; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 33; Ritter 2010, 39; Kaimakamova 2010, 218–220; Dall'Aglio 2013, 307; Ritter 2013, 177–178; Iosipescu 2013b, 23; Dobychina 2015, 342–343; Stankov 2015, 360.

tsar John Vladislav (1016–1018).<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note in this respect that Constantine Bodin, a native Serbian who led the Bulgarian and Serb rebellion of 1072, also took the name of Peter.<sup>16</sup> Asan's brother may have therefore assumed the name Peter because of what was now a political tradition, which had been initiated by Peter Deljan, linked to the idea of fighting for the liberation of the Bulgarians from the Byzantine domination. Indeed, why would he relate himself to Tsar Peter I who pursued a policy of peace and reconciliation with Byzantium? A later Venetian source claims that the Vlachs' (*Valachi*) participated along with the Bulgarians in an uprising that took place in Byzantium at the time of the Doge Domenico Flabianico (1032–1043), i.e., in Peter Deljan's rebellion.<sup>17</sup> For that reason, Peter Deljan was regarded as a hero not only by Bulgarians, but also by their fellow Vlachs. In order to emphasize continuity with Tsar Peter, some Bulgarian historians nonetheless call him Theodore Peter IV.<sup>18</sup>

Peter was most likely the oldest brother, according to a passage of the chronicle ascribed to Theodore Skutariotes. That source is in fact just a compilation of the material in Niketas Choniates' history, from which, however, this particular piece of information is missing. However, some historians have accepted it at face value.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, the passage in Skutariotes is not clear, since ὁ δὲ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πρῶτος Πέτρος καὶ στέφανον τῇ κεφαλῇ περιτίθησι may also be translated as "Peter was the first of the brothers to engird his head with a crown." In other words, Peter was not the first (oldest) brother, but according to Theodore Skutariotes, the first of the two brothers to proclaim himself emperor. Such a quality is recognized by George Tornikes II in a speech dated to 1193, which will be analyzed in Chapter 5. In that speech, Peter is named "the first to rebel" (ὁ πρωτοαποστάτης Πέτρος).<sup>20</sup> Likewise, when referring to the rebellion, Michael Choniates associates it with Peter, and he calls him a "hateful and renegade slave" (ἀποστήσαντος πονηροῦ δούλου Πέτρου),<sup>21</sup> thus suggesting his role in initiating the movement. There is no other source providing information about the age difference between Peter and Asan. However, an

15 Zlatarski 1972, II, 42–69; Wolff 1949, 179; Cheynet 1990, 50, 388–389; Fine 1991, 203–206; Treadgold 1997, 588; Stephenson 2000, 130–133.

16 Stephenson 2000, 142.

17 Caroldo, 92.

18 Atanasov 1999, 122–128; Kaimakamova 2010, 219–220.

19 Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 372; FGHV VIII, 244; FHDR III, 414/415); Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 105; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 61; Božilov 1985, 40.

20 Georgios Tornikes II, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 274 (FHDR III, 392/393).

21 Michael Choniates, 67 (ed. Lambros, 246–247).

undeniable fact is that Peter was the first of the two brothers to assume the title of tsar.<sup>22</sup> The Latin sources referring to the Third Crusade call him *Kalopetrus*, a name derived from the Greek word *kalos*, “beautiful, handsome.” During his sojourn in Constantinople, where he was held hostage, Peter’s younger brother Johannitsa would be given a similar Byzantine name—“the handsome John,” *Kaloioannes* in Greek, or *Kaloian* in Bulgarian.<sup>23</sup>

The name *Asan* is of Turkic origin and most likely derives from *esen* (“healthy, smart”). A Cuman Khan who died in 1082 was named *Osen*.<sup>24</sup> There was also a leader of the Volga Bulgars from the Kazan region, who was named Asan and who appears in 1376.<sup>25</sup> Cuman or Pecheneg names were adopted by many other peoples, including the Vlachs in Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>26</sup> According to the Hungarian Orientalist István Vásáry,

while the Turkic origin of the name *Asen* can be taken for granted, the historical consequences drawn from this fact by earlier researchers cannot be accepted. No serious argument can be put forward in support of the Asenids’ Bulgarian or Russian origin. Moreover, a Cuman name by itself cannot prove that its bearer was undoubtedly Cuman. Asen’s Turkic (probably Cuman) name must be reconciled with the fact that the sources unanimously testify to his being Vlach. This must be the basis of any further deductions: *Asen was a Vlach and bore a Cuman name*.<sup>27</sup>

Asan’s Christian name was John (Ioan). Boril’s *Synodikon* gives him with that combined name (Ivan/John Asan), while one version of the Life of Saint John of Rila mentions that Asan was given the name Ioan when baptized.<sup>28</sup> Even though Niketas Choniates and George Akropolites called him Asan, that appears to have been his last name. His younger brother was called by the diminutive Ioniță (Johannitsa, “little John”), in order to distinguish him from John/Ivan. *Belgun*, the other name that Asan had according to Boril’s *Synodikon*

22 Iosipescu 1994, 261; Lazăr 2010, 9; Ritter 2010, 39, 60; Ritter 2013, 194.

23 Dujčev 1975, 177.

24 Jireček 1911, 269; Philippide 1916, 228; Moravcsik 1958, 11, 73–75; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 103; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 56; Malingoudis 1978, 86–87; Angelov 1984, p. 42; Stoyanov 2002, 683; Vásáry 2005, 38–41; Brüggemann 2007–2008, 64–65.

25 Martin 1975, 8, 15.

26 Spinei 2009, 311–330.

27 Vásáry 2005, 40.

28 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 77; Petkov 2008, 254, 266; Krăstev 2004, 26; Stankov 2015, 361–362.

in Drinov's version, is also of Turkic origin. It derives from *bilge* ("wise"), most likely adopted as a nickname.<sup>29</sup>

On the basis of an error, the Bessarabian heraldist Grigore Jitaru claimed that Asan's real name was Roman. Jitaru's error was to take the Tsar Constantine Asan (whose reign is covered in Chapter 9) who made a donation for the Monastery of St. George Berzi as "the successor of the Bulgarian Tsars Roman, Peter, Kaloyan, Ioan Asan II and Kaliman."<sup>30</sup> In reality, the donation made to the Monastery of Saint George in Vergino Brdo, Macedonia—a forgery made a century later on the basis of authentic documents—mentions Byzantine emperors, and not Bulgarian rulers as benefactors. Roman is therefore the Emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), who established the monastery: *sveti Roman car, Diogen car, sveti Petar car, kir Nikifor car, sveti kir Aleksije car, Kalojovan car, kir Manojlo car, kir Teodor car, kir Isak car, sveti Simeon Nemanja, deda carstva mi, Vatac car (i) Kaliman car.*<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately Jitaru's error was reproduced by Sergiu Iosipescu (who made it his own), who further used it as an argument to prove "the Roman origin and reputation" of the Asan family.<sup>32</sup> Even if we accept for a moment that Asan's other name was Roman, that would have no bearing on his ethnicity. The name *Roman* had nothing to do with the Romans, but was a relatively common Christian name, that of several saints named Romanus or Romanos. One of the most famous was the poet Romanos Melodos (490–556), but the name *Roman* was adopted by several other (Orthodox) Christian peoples—Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians, and Russians.

A slightly different version of the Kypsella incident, which is rarely taken into account by historians, appears in Robert de Clari. In a digression about John the Vlach (*Jehans li Blakis*), namely Johannitsa, the French chronicler shows that

Vlachia is a land held under the Emperor's domain; and this John was a sergeant of the emperor, having charge of one of the emperor's horse farms; every time the emperor would ask, John would sent him 60 to 100 horses; he would also come to court once a year. One day, however, as he presented himself at the court a eunuch or usherer of the emperor

29 *Synodikon*, ed. Popruženko, 77; Zlatarski 1972, II, 427; Malingoudis 1978, 87; Angelov 1984, 42; Butler 1996, 211; Krāstev 2004, 25–29; Vásáry 2005, 40; Petkov 2008, 254; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 32; Stankov 2015, 361.

30 Jitaru 1992, 34.

31 Teoteoi 1989, 71; Kravari 1989, 155, 242–243; Petkov 2008, 487; Blagojević 2009, 150; Živojinović 2015, 43–53.

32 Iosipescu 2013b, 22–23.



struck him in the face with a whip and thus did him wrong. John was really upset, and because of this he left the court in rage and returned to Vlachia.<sup>33</sup>

Robert de Clari mistakes Johannitsa for his older brother John Asan,<sup>34</sup> but the information about him being in charge of a horse farm is worth considering. The Vlachs on the southern bank of the Danube, as well as those ones on the northern bank, specialized in cattle breeding during the Middle Age.<sup>35</sup>

That John Asan was denied the request is curious, especially if all he wanted a simple *pronoia* was requested. The emperor must have been in need of troops for his war against the Normans. It is therefore possible that Peter and Asan had asked for much more, and that Choniates does not tell us all that happened in Kypsella. Although most historians believe that the two brothers asked for a *pronoia*,<sup>36</sup> Paul Lemerle pointed out that that kind of donations had been requested before, without any of them being called a *pronoia*.<sup>37</sup> Following an older idea of Petăr Mutafčiev (embraced by Vasil Zlatarski as well), John Fine believed that such a request did not normally involved seeing the emperor in person. The real request must have had much greater weight: the two brothers asked to rule of a territory, namely a part of the province of Moesia.<sup>38</sup> Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca also interpreted the two brothers' aspirations as referring to some kind of autonomy, in exchange for their the participation in the war against William II.<sup>39</sup> Jean-Claude Cheynet, although admitting that Peter and Asan had asked for a *pronoia*, also believed that the initial goal of the rebellion was the autonomy of the region around Anchialos.<sup>40</sup> In consideration of all those standpoints, Mark Bartusis reached the conclusion that requesting enrollment in the army, and a domain by means of an imperial letter matched

33 Robert de Clari, c. 64 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 119–120).

34 Curta 2016, 433, 453 considers that the source concerns indeed Johannitsa.

35 Based on that, Malingoudis 1978, 85–86 believed that Asan was a Cuman, since the Cumans were horse breeders. That may well be true, but they were certainly not the only horse breeders in the region.

36 Anastasijević, Ostrogorsky 1951, 20; Dujčev 1952–1953, 229; Angelov 1967, 155; Brand 1968, 89; Malingoudis 1978, 83; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 98; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 56; Angelov 1984, 41–42; Prinzing 1999–2000, 259; Vásáry 2005, 16; Curta 2006, 359; Ritter 2010, 32–33, 38; Murdzhev 2011, 69; Ritter 2013, 172; Simpson 2015, 33.

37 Lemerle 1959, 281.

38 Zlatarski 1972, II, 435–438; Fine 1994, 10.

39 Tanașoca 2001, 121.

40 Cheynet 1990, 120, 450–451.

the standard procedure for granting *paroikoi* mentioned by Niketas Choniates as a characteristic of *pronoia*, but without the mention of lifelong donation.<sup>41</sup>

It is true that the terms Niketas employs (*basilika grammata*, *chorion*) connote a *pronoia*, but another passage refers to Peter and Asan occupying the “Moesian toparchy,” once a Vlach territory.<sup>42</sup> In the 11th and 12th centuries, a toparch was the leader of some small marginal area, either independent or attached to the empire, who held an intermediate position between the emperor and his subjects. Toparchs were foreigners, either foes or friends of the empire.<sup>43</sup> Kekaumenos, a nobleman from Larissa, describes toparchs as potential rebels over whom governors of neighboring provinces should keep a permanent watch.<sup>44</sup> Even Niketas Choniates mentions toparchs. One of them is Stephen Nemanja, the Serbian great župan (also called satrap) who was attacked by the Byzantine army in 1172. Another was Izzedin Saltuk II, the Seljuk sultan (1132–1168), and Masud, one of the Seljuk sultan’s sons, Kiliji Arslan, was also a toparch.<sup>45</sup> In another passage, Choniates describes a toparchy as a land different from the territory of the Empire and inhabited by foreigners. The opposite of a toparchy was the eparchy, the name employed for an imperial province.<sup>46</sup>

Those examples prove that in Niketas Choniates’s view a toparch was an independent leader of an area once part of the empire, and that his use of that term in Moesia’s case includes Peter and Asan in the same category as the leaders of territories detached either through conquest, or through rebellion. Certainly the mention of the toparchy relates to a time after the rebellion (autumn and winter of 1186), but there is no reason to question the assumption that Moesia’s autonomy was Peter and Asan’s real claim, rejected as exaggerated. Thus one can acknowledge that the initial goal of the rebellion was the autonomy of a region within the empire. It is a situation different from that in Serbia at that time, where the goal was to achieve independence with Hungary’s support. Sergiu Iosipescu understands Peter and Asan’s request in the same way, namely to be granted a territory.<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that the

41 Bartusis 2013, 98.

42 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 374; transl. Magoulias, 206; FHDR II, 258/259); Iosipescu 1994, 253; Iosipescu 2013b, 22.

43 Cheynet 1984, 215–220; Cheynet 1990, 287–288.

44 Kekaumenos, cap. 68, 72 (transl. Beck, 55, 58 = ed. Spadaro, 102/103, 104/105).

45 Niketas Choniates, *Manuel Comnenos*, v; *Alexios Porphyrogenitos*; (ed. Van Dieten, 159, 226, 521; transl. Magoulias, 90, 128, 286).

46 Niketas Choniates, *Andronikos Comnenos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 347; transl. Magoulias, 191). This fact was noticed by Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1962, 323.

47 Iosipescu 1994, 252–253; Iosipescu 2013b, 22.

absence of the word *pronoia* from Niketas Choniates's text should not surprise, for he does not use that word at all. Moreover, if *chorion* also means "country," then the sense of "domain" in this context is quite clear, having an income related to it (*prosodon*).

If Peter and Asan went to Kypsella to request a simple *pronoia*, Niketas Choniates would not have prefaced this narrative with the passage on the abuses against the Vlachs. Although not directly, he accuses the two Vlachs of taking advantage of their people's discontent in order to claim a toparchy from their emperor, in which the Vlachs would be autonomous. Failing to succeed, they started the rebellion. It was therefore a premeditated act, a request expressed as an ultimatum.<sup>48</sup>

Despite all the serious reasons of discontent against the imperial authority, the population did not have the courage to rebel, as Peter and Asan had expected. However, they had the brilliant idea to manipulate the masses in a typically medieval way. Thessaloniki was not only the largest city in the empire after the capital; it was also the commercial and spiritual center of the entire eastern region of the Balkan Peninsula, having Saint Demetrios the Myrrh-Streamer as patron. Just as today, this saint was very popular among Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Serbs. In a work of an unknown author from the mid-12th century (*Timarion*) the feast of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki (October 26) is mentioned as

the greatest feast for the Macedonians. For it is an occasion where people, not only crowds of locals of the same kind, come from everywhere and of every origin, Greeks from far and wide, various neighboring Moesian people as far as the Istros and Scythia, Campanians, Italics, Liberians, Lusitans and Celts from beyond the Alps.<sup>49</sup>

The Norman conquest of Thessaloniki and its savage destruction could lead the inhabitants of the Macedonian metropolis to believe that the saint had abandoned them (Saint Demetrios was regarded patron of the imperial authority). At this point Peter and Asan had a shrewd plan. They built hastily a church

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48 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 104: "Toutefois leur demande formulée d'une manière ultimative d'une admission à la pronoia et l'attitude très fière du frère cadet Asen, le plus audacieux des deux, indiquent peut-être leur intention préconçue dans le cas d'un refus de se mettre à la tête de la révolte". Dall'Aglio, 2011a, 60 considers too that "la decisione era stata già presa e poco aveva a che fare con la concessione di un appezzamento di terra in *pronoia*".

49 *Timarion*, 46 (FHDR III, 184/185); Lapina 2009, 97.

(probably of timber) dedicated to Saint Demetrios, alleging that he had left Thessaloniki to protect the Vlachs and the Bulgarians:

At first, the Vlachs were reluctant and turned away from the revolt urged upon them by Peter and Asan, looking askance at the magnitude of the undertaking. To overcome the timidity of their compatriots, the brothers built a house of prayer (εκτήριος οἶκος) in the name of the Good Martyr Demetrios. In it they gathered many demoniacs (δαιμονολήπτων) of both races (γένους);<sup>50</sup> with crossed and bloodshot eyes, hair disheveled, and with precisely all the other symptoms demonstrated by those possessed by demons, they were instructed to say in their ravings that the God of the race of the Bulgars and Vlachs had consented to their freedom and assented that they should shake off after so long a time the yoke from their neck; and in support of this cause, Demetrios, the Martyr for Christ, would abandon the metropolis of Thessaloniki and his church there and the customary haunts of the Romans and come over to them to be their helper and assistant in their forthcoming task. These madmen would keep still for a short while and then, suddenly moved by the spirit, would rave like lunatics; they would start up and shout and shriek, as though inspired (ἐνθουσιαστικὸν),<sup>51</sup> that this was no time to sit still but to take weapons in hand and close with the Romans. Those seized in battle should not be taken captive or preserved alive but slaughtered, killed without mercy; neither should they release them for ransom nor yield to supplication, succumbing like women to genuflections. Rather, they should remain as hard as diamonds to every plea and put to death every captive. With such soothsayers (θεοπρόπων) as these, the entire nation was won over, and everyone took up arms. Since their rebellion was immediately successful, all the more did they assume that God had approved of their freedom.<sup>52</sup>

50 Not genders, as translated by Murnu 1906, 379, Bănescu 1943 and FHDR III. For the right translation (two ethnies, Vlachs and Bulgars) see Zlatarski 1972, II, 413–414; Cihodaru 1977, 74; Malingoudis 1978, 107; Angelov 1984, 43; Curta 2006, 359.

51 A more proper translation of this word could be “in ecstasy”.

52 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 371; transl. Magoulias, 205; FHDR III, 256/257); Zlatarski 1972, II, 412–413, 440–441; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 104–105; Angelov 1984, 43; Angelov 1985, 9; Fine 1994, 11; Stephenson 2000, 290; Curta 2006, 359; Lapina 2009, 109; Ritter 2010, 35–36; Dall’Aglio 2013, 306; Dobychna 2012, 93–100; Curta 2016, 443 (who points to the connection made by Choniates with the future episode when the rebels were compared with the pigs possessed by demons mentioned in the Gospels, after the first victory of the Byzantine army in April 1186).

It seems that, when using the news of the fall of Thessaloniki (which apparently reached as far as the northern Balkans, within a relatively short span of time), Peter and Asan implied that the catastrophe had been caused by the great city's losing the protection of its patron. Saint Demetrios had now transferred his favor unto the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, whom he was now helping to remove the Byzantine yoke.<sup>53</sup> They could not have rebelled against the emperor, who was God's representative on earth, had Saint Demetrios not have acted in the first place as a messenger of divine wrath. As Leonidas Mavromatis noted, "from this moment onwards, the true chief of operations was St. Demetrius, while the Bulgarian noblemen leading his fellow countrymen into battle were just tools for the accomplishment of God's plan."<sup>54</sup> A guarantor of victory against the Byzantines, Saint Demetrios also became the protector of the state that resulted from that revolt. His portrait appears on the coins minted in the Second Bulgarian empire, as well as on some of the seals of the tsars Asan, Boril and John Asan II.<sup>55</sup>

An icon of the saint, which was believed to have performed miracles, was placed on display within also the improvised place of worship. An epigram of the Patriarch of Antioch, Theodore Balsamon, eulogized Isaac II for having recovered the icon of Saint Demetrios from the settlement of the rebel "Sthlavopetros" (Peter). The icon in question had been apparently stolen from Thessaloniki during the Norman attack.<sup>56</sup>

However, the icon was not sufficient to persuade the faithful to go to war. According to Niketas Choniates, it was only the possessed soothsayers that convinced the people to rise in rebellion. Who were those soothsayers? Taking the text at face value, Xenopol believed that the soothsayers were epileptic who had been instructed to prophesy.<sup>57</sup> Phaidon Malingoudis saw a striking similarity with a Bulgarian custom from southern Thrace, which is called "nestinarstvo" (or *ἀνασθενάριον* in Greek) and consists of dancing on embers in a state of ecstasy, while icons in the hands. The ritual in question

53 Obolensky 1974, 18–19; Stepanenko 2003, 60; Erdeljan 2009, 463; Lazăr 2009, 5–6; Lazăr 2011, 166–167; Dobychna 2015, 341–342.

54 Mavromatis 1985, 37: "Désormais, le vrai général en chef de l'opération était Saint Démétrius lui-même et les nobles bulgares qui conduiraient leur compatriotes à la guerre n'étaient que des instruments pour la réalisation des desseins de Dieu."

55 Jordanov 2001a, 99 (nr. 152, 153), 105 (nr. 155, 156), 110 (nr. 157); Stepanenko 2003, 60–61; Stepanov 2007, 162–165.

56 Horna 1903, 192 (FGHB X, p. 112); Tăpkova-Zaimova 1978, 262–267; Malingoudis 1978, 76; Angelov 1984, 47; Angelov 1985, 10; Prinzing 1999–2000, 263–264; Stephenson 2000, 290; Lapina 2009, 109; Erdeljan 2009, 463; Dobychna 2012, 94–95.

57 Xenopol 1891, 284.

is commonly associated with the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen (May 21). Malingoudis's interpretation is in fact based on a manuscript error, namely the word Ἀσθενάρια, which appears in Theodore Skutariotes's account of the same events (to compound the error, the translators in FHDR III chose the Romanian word for "sick," under the assumption that Ἀσθενάρια is a cognate of *asthenia*). As Nikos Bees has long demonstrated, the word in question is nothing but the bad (manuscript) transmission of ἀνασθενάριον.<sup>58</sup> While it is quite possible that Theodore Skutariotes had the "nestinarstvo" in mind,<sup>59</sup> Choniates's description of the possessed soothsayers has nothing to do with that ritual. There is no fire, and no dancing on embers in Choniates's account. Theodor Capidan was the first to draw attention to a particular detail, namely that the soothsayers allegedly had twisted eyelids turned inside out, and bloodshot eyes (or, as Harry Magoulias translated διαστρόφους, "crossed and bloodshot eyes"). The custom of turning the eyelids inside out in order to scare the children was known to Vlachs in the early 20th century, but not to Bulgarians.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, Choniates' description suggests a magic ritual not unlike known shamanic practices.<sup>61</sup> There is a surprisingly similar story about those practicing magic and incantations (*incantationibus*), which has been recorded in the 1646 account of the missionary bishop of Moldavia, Marco Bandini. The people whom the bishop described contorted their bodies, which shivered from all the limbs, before entering a cataleptic state for to four hours (*mortuis similiores, spatio unius horae, non nunquam trium aut quator, quasi exanimis manent*). After waking up, they narrated the dreams they had in that condition as oracles.<sup>62</sup> It has been suggested that such ecstatic experience was induced by means of hallucinogens, perhaps mushrooms.<sup>63</sup> At any rate, Bandini's account has been interpreted as evidence of shamanic practices among either the Romanians or the Csangos, among whom he ministered as missionary bishop.<sup>64</sup> If so, then the account is particularly important for understanding what happened in 1185.

Peter made an additional, symbolic gesture in order to mobilize his countrymen. He crowned himself with a golden wreath (στεφανίσκῳ χρυσέῳ διαδείται

58 Malingoudis 1978, 107–112.

59 About *anastenaria*, see Puchner 2009, 193–212; Xygalatas 2011.

60 Murnu 1906, 379; Capidan 1924–1926, 202.

61 Fine 1994, 11 had too this idea ("Vlach shamans"). Rásonyi 1927, 69 argued that the ritual inherited the shamanic practices of the Cumans who lived before in Moldavia.

62 Urechia 1895, CLVIII, 154.

63 Oişteanu 2011, 64, 416.

64 Eliade 1995, 201–204, 212–213.

τὴν κεφαλὴν) and put on red boots.<sup>65</sup> Both insignias were exclusive attributes of the Byzantine emperors, which explains why contemporary sources maintained that Peter had proclaimed himself emperor from the beginning.<sup>66</sup> According to Ansbertus, to whose testimony I shall return in Chapter 5, (December 1189), “Kalopeter, the lord of the Vlachs and the greater part of the Bulgarians in the region<sup>67</sup> of Thrace who [called himself] emperor, [sent an envoy and] earnestly entreated that the imperial crown of the kingdom of the Greeks might be given to him” (*Kalopetrus, Blacorum et maxime partis Bulgarorum in hortis Traciae domnus, qui se imperatorem et coronam imperialem regni Grecia ab eo sibi imponi efflagitabat*).<sup>68</sup>

The “wreath” that Niketas Choniates calls στεφανίσκος is believed to have been something similar to a diadem (στέμμα), which was commonly worn by Byzantine emperors and appears clearly on Asan’s seals (see below).<sup>69</sup> The specific diadem that Peter put on his head may have been made by goldsmiths from Tărnovo, and the diminutive employed by Choniates is most likely a sign of his contempt for the Vlach ruler’s pretensions.<sup>70</sup> Ever since the 10th century, the crown of the Byzantine emperors was commonly called στέφανος since the 10th century,<sup>71</sup> but in the 12th century both the *caesar* and the *sebastocrator* wore crowns as well.<sup>72</sup>

Even though Niketas Choniates did not directly accuse him of that, Peter seems to have claimed the imperial title from the very beginning of the revolt. In doing so, he was not alone, for many such rebels at that time had similar claims. For example, Isaac Comnenos, one of Manuel’s nephews, proclaimed himself emperor in Cyprus in 1184.<sup>73</sup> Much closer to Peter’s case is, however, Theodore Mankaphas’s usurpation.<sup>74</sup> Judging from the existing evidence, Peter

65 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 372; transl. Magoulias, 205; FHDR III, 256/257).

66 Jireček 1876, 226; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 105; Jordanov 2001b, 455–456; Brezeanu 2001, 75; Curta 2006, 360; Kaimakamova 2010, 218; Ritter 2010, 38–39; Ritter 2013, 178; Iosipescu 2013b, 20, 23; Dobychna 2015, 342.

67 The meaning in the medieval Latin of *hortus* is “estate” (Niermeyer 1976, 500).

68 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 58 (transl. Loud, 84; FLHB III, 279).

69 Atanasov 1999, 123–124.

70 Iosipescu 1994, 261.

71 Grotowski 2010, pp. 288–289.

72 Hendy 1969, pp. 165–167; Parani 2003, 68.

73 Brand 1968, 55; Hoffmann 1974, 32–38, 86–89; Cheynet 1990, 116–117; Kojčeva 1993, 131.

74 Brand 1968, 85, 87; Hoffmann 1974, 66–68, 99; Cheynet 1990, 123, 454–455; Magdalino 2008, 656.

was claiming the imperial title *per se*, without any attributes (“emperor of the Vlachs and/or the Bulgarians”). That is most likely why following his defeat and capture by John Tzimiskes in 971, Emperor Boris II was symbolically deprived of both his golden crown (στέφανος) and his red boot—the exact same attributes of the imperial power employed by Peter.<sup>75</sup>

The Vlach ruler may have felt the protection of Saint Demetrios when deciding to usurp the symbols of the Byzantine imperial power. In fact, at that particular moment Isaac II Angelos was no better than any other usurper, since he had won the throne by overthrowing Andronikos Komnenos (who suffered afterwards a most horrible death). Since in the eyes of the petty aristocracy and ordinary people in the provinces, Andronikos had passed for a good emperor, his removal from power may have well aroused suspicion, if not outright hostility. As it were, Isaac II Angelos turned out to be a weakling, who brought the state to military and economic disaster. He was removed from power by his own brother, who then blinded and threw him into prison (1196).

It is very likely, therefore, that before the year 1185 was over, Peter had called himself tsar (emperor). A certain priest named Basil was appointed archbishop of the Bulgarian church, and it is likely that it was him who proclaimed Peter as tsar. The date of the appointment of Basil results from his 1203 letter to Pope Innocent III, in which he confesses his joy said that after 18 years, his wish to be blessed by the pope had come true. Basil clearly had in mind the moment at which he rejected the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, namely 1185.<sup>76</sup> In two documents dated to 1216 and 1218, respectively, Demetrios Chomatenos, Archbishop of Ohrid, claims that the first archbishop of Bulgaria was ordained by the bishop of Vidin, who was a suffragan of Ohrid, and by two other bishops.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike Choniates and George Tornikes II, Robert de Clari and George Akropolites blamed Asan, not Peter for having started the rebellion. According to Robert de Clari, John (Asan) gathered around him the important people of Vlachia (*les haus homes de Blakie*), whom he won on his side by means of gifts and who eventually recognized him as their lord (*sires d'aus*).<sup>78</sup> Moreover, according to George Akropolites “a certain man, Asan by name, rose up and ruled over the land as emperor (βασιλεύει τῆς χώρας), subjecting everything

75 Dall’Aglia 2013, 307.

76 PL, vol. 215, 238 (n. v) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 27 (doc. XIX) = FLHB III, 336; Jireček 1876, 226; Zlatarski 1972, II, 473; Guiland 1964, 129; Primov 1971, 19; Fine 1994, 16.

77 Demetrios Chomatenos, 70\*, 50 (nr. 8), 424 (nr. 146); Tarnanidis 1975, 28; Mălinaș 2000, 82; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2007, 425.

78 Robert de Clari, c. 65 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 120).



between the Haimos and the Ister.”<sup>79</sup> The French chronicler mistook Asan for his younger brother Johannitsa, while Akropolites reproduced the version of the events favored by Asan’s son, John Asan II, to whom that interpretation of history served against Boril (see chapters 7 and 8).<sup>80</sup> That is precisely why, in this respect, Akropolites’ testimony is of no value. It is important to note that Asan also appears as the first emperor in Boril’s *Synodikon*, which regarded him as “the one who freed the Bulgarian people from Greek bondage.”<sup>81</sup> It is quite possible that the 1211 text of the *Synodikon* was modified under John Asan II to reflect his version of the events, the one that George Akropolites also reproduced. A dim, later reflection of the same manipulation of history may be Paisij of Hilandar’s firm conviction that Asan was the first emperor crowned at Tarnovo, before Peter.<sup>82</sup>

The other event that triggered the revolt, albeit with no military consequences, was the celebration of the marriage between Isaac II and the Hungarian princess. Béla III may have his daughter’s hand at some point after Isaac became emperor. Isaac II took the power on September 12, 1185, and at least a month was needed for the news to reach Hungary, and for Béla III’s envoys to reach Constantinople. It is therefore impossible that the wedding preparations had already started by the time Peter and Asan came to Kypsella to request an imperial favor. Instead, the preparations must have started late in the year 1185, when the two brothers had already returned home. Genoveva Cankova-Petkova rightly believed that the preparations for the wedding started shortly after the battle of Dimitritsi (November 7, 1185), and that the wedding itself took place in early 1186, most likely in February.<sup>83</sup>

If so, then the tax increase could not have triggered the revolt. Instead, Peter and Asan rose in rebellion late in the year 1185, in order to obtain autonomy. When in the spring of 1186, the residents of Anchialos and the neighboring cities were oppressed with increased taxes, the two Vlach leaders took advantage of the popular outrage. They could not let go such a great opportunity to feed the flames and channel the anger against the imperial authorities. The Vlachs, on the other hand, who saw their herds abusively reduced by excessive taxation, harbored resentment for quite some time. As Sergiu Iosipescu noted,

79 Akropolites, II (ed. Heisenberg, 18; transl. Macrides, 133; FHDR III, 398/399).

80 Tanaşoca 2003, 90–91.

81 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 77; Petkov 2008, 254.

82 Paisij, 89–94. According to Paisij, Asan reigned for 50 years.

83 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 96, 104; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 56. The same opinion in Van Dieten 1971, 90; Malingoudis 1978, 58, 73, 113–114; Prinzing 1999–2000, 264, Ritter 2010, 30, 107–108 and Ritter 2013, 169.

Peter and Asan must have spoken on behalf of the rich pastoralists entrenched in the strongholds of the Haemus Mountains—the Vlach nobility.<sup>84</sup> The mountain population had steadily increased through refugees from the lowlands devastated by Pecheneg and Cuman attacks. The newcomers may have themselves been pastoralists.<sup>85</sup>

That this was no spontaneous rebellion results from the analysis of most other, similar, centrifugal movements, in which the aristocrats used the popular anger to reach their own goals. Robert de Clari must have known something about that when describing John (Asan) making gifts to the left and to the right, until “all people in the country bowed to him” and recognized him as their lord.<sup>86</sup> The phrase *haus homes de Blakie* refers to the Vlach nobility, many members of which had vested interests in the rebellion.

Several ethnic groups—Bulgarians, Serbs, Pechenegs, Vlachs—had participated in anti-Byzantine rebellions throughout the 11th century, but none of those rebellions could be described “national movement.” This applies even Peter Deljan’s revolt of 1040, which is said to have been triggered by the decision of replace the Bulgarian archbishop of Ohrid with a Greek prelate. The economic reasons for all and each one of those rebellions were certainly combined with a certain anti-Byzantine attitude linked to a sense of nostalgia for the lost Bulgarian empire. That explains why both Peter Deljan and, later, Constantine Bodin aspired to restore Samuel’s empire. But Bulgaria was not a “national” state, but an empire modeled after Byzantium and, as such, involved the ethnically diverse population of the central Balkans. There is no other explanation for the fact that in 1072 the rebels of Macedonia invited a Serb from Dioclea, Constantine Bodin, to become the emperor of the Bulgarians. Just like Macedonia, Dioclea had been a part of the Bulgarian empire(s) of Symeon and Samuel. Because several ethnic groups were engaged in the struggle for the restoration of Bulgaria, it may be concluded that for the Byzantine authors the term “Bulgarians” (*Boulgaroi*) had a political, and not just ethnic meaning, which was modeled after the term “Romans” (*Romaiot*).<sup>87</sup> Such a meaning remained in use until the very end of the Second Bulgarian Empire. By contrast, the term “Vlachs” had an exclusively ethnic sense, with no political connotations (Vlachia was a country, not an empire).

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84 Iosipescu 1994, 252.

85 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 101.

86 Robert de Clari, c. 65 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 120).

87 For these movements, see Madgearu 2008, 62–70. For the Marxist point of view, that the estate owners, the cattle traders and the pronoiars used the rebellion of the shepherds to evade the fiscal pressure, see Panaitescu 1969, 217.

In 1072, the year in which Constantine Bodin was proclaimed emperor of the Bulgarians, the “mixed barbarians” of the cities in the Paradunavon theme rose in rebellion against Emperor Michael VII (1067–1078) because of his oppressive tax policies. The Pechenegs, who had settled in the area for 25 years at that time, became the main military factor of the rebellion, as well as of the secessionist movement which lasted until 1091. The Pecheneg chieftain Tatos settled in Dristra (the provincial capital of Paradunavon), and, as a result, the Byzantine Empire lost control over Dobrudja and the northeastern part of modern Bulgaria. The revolt received support from the Pechenegs on the opposite bank of the Danube, in what is now Romania. The region effectively became independent, with power exercised by Pechenegs warriors in alliance with people of different ethnic backgrounds, who lived in the many fortresses of that area. The Vlachs, called *Balakayê* in the chronicle of Michael, Patriarch of Antioch (1126–1199), were most certainly among those people.<sup>88</sup>

The opposition of the non-Greek populations of Southeastern Europe to the central power had absolutely no “national” character, precisely because such movements brought together several ethnic groups. This was the case also of the 1185 revolt. Some of the 11th-century, centrifugal movements aimed at gaining independence for particular regions (Thessaly, Paradunavon), others at the restoration of the Bulgarian Empire (Peter Deljan, Constantine Bodin). One such centrifugal movement had succeeded just a few years before Peter and Asan’s revolt, albeit with support from the outside, namely from Hungary. The Serbian great župan, Stephen Nemanja, proclaimed his independence in 1183. This precedent may have emboldened the rebels of 1185, as Bulgarians had often cooperated in the recent past with the Serbs.<sup>89</sup>

It is also a gross mistake to regard Bulgarians as a population persecuted under the Byzantine rule, because there was no such thing as ethnic discriminations in Byzantium, at least not against fellow Orthodox. Though, there was a systematic action to eliminate the Bulgarian military capacity; the deployment of the forces recruited in Bulgaria to other, remote provinces; the exile of the surviving aristocrats; and the deliberate destruction of the main symbols of power—imperial palaces in Preslav and Ohrid, all that was imperial policy of conquest, not ethnic cleansing. The Bulgarian patriarchate was abolished for the same reason in 1018, after which its jurisdiction was transferred to the archbishopric of Ohrid. That part of Bulgaria that had already been conquered in 1001 was placed under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople. Except the first years, during which Basil II allowed a Bulgarian to serve as

88 Madgearu 2013a, 79–84, 131–132, 137–139.

89 Dujčev 1952–1953, 229; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 98.

archbishop of Ohrid, all subsequent archbishops of that see were Greeks. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian culture of Slavonic expression survived, and even experienced something of an expansion during the 11th–12th centuries.<sup>90</sup>

Two social and economic groups in the population of the eastern Balkans were therefore responsible for the revolt of 1185. The Vlach or Bulgarian pastoralists from the Haemus Mountains, were a particularly aggressive group. They may have been allied with petty Bulgarian aristocrats who had preserved their land without being integrated into the administrative and bureaucratic structure of the Byzantine state. Those *bolari* (boyars) kept alive the idea of the liberation from the Byzantine domination, as demonstrated by their participation in the previous revolts of 1040 and 1072.<sup>91</sup> Those petty Bulgarian aristocrats, as many as had been left, had no other choice but to revolt.<sup>92</sup> The second group of rebels was made up of ordinary people, and must have therefore been quite heterogeneous—the sedentary population of the coastal and inland cities, as well as that of the rural areas with large estates owned by the emperor or by Byzantine aristocrats.

The revolt started in Tărnovo.<sup>93</sup> The city is located at the boundary between the lowlands and the first slopes of the Balkan (Stara Planina) Mountains. In Niketas Choniates's words, Tărnovo was "the best fortified and, at the same time, the most important of the fortresses of Haemus, surrounded by strong walls and divided in two by the course of a river and located on top of a mountain."<sup>94</sup> The river in question is Yantra, which meanders between the Trapezitsa, the Tsarevets, the Momina Krepost (or Devingrad), and the Sveta Gora hills. Tsarevets, the hill with the best natural defense and an area of about 30 acres, had already been occupied in Late Antiquity (the 6th-century city of

90 For Bulgaria during the Byzantine domination see Zlatarski 1972, II, 252–352; Cankova-Petkova 1962; Tivčev, Cankova-Petkova 1966; Angelov 1967; Litavrin 1994; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2008; Ilieva 2011.

91 Litavrin 1994, 72.

92 According to Mavromatis 1985, 35, "ils n'étaient considérés que fournisseurs de richesses aux caisses de l'Etat et il n'y avait pas de place pour eux dans l'élite de l'empire. En fait la seule issue pour cette noblesse était la révolte, voire la rupture définitive avec l'Etat romain."

93 Zlatarski 1972, II, 440–441; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 105; Angelov 1985, 7. Other historians disagree, because Niketas Choniates supposedly says nothing about that (Malingoudis 1978, 75). Moreover, Žekova 2004, 344–347 wrongly assumed that the first capital until 1190 was Preslav.

94 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 470; transl. Magoulias, 258; FHDR III, 284/285).

Zikideva), with suburbs built on the Trapezitsa and the Momina Krepost hills.<sup>95</sup> During the 9th and 10th centuries, the fortification on the Tsarevets was reoccupied and that occupation continued through the 11th and 12th centuries, when the site became a Byzantine stronghold overseeing access along the Yantra to the mountain passes of Tryavna and Šipka. The residence of a *strategos*, an urban commander, was located on the site of the future Asanid palace on the Tsarevets hill (according to other opinions, that building was the property of the Asan family, and had been built by the mid-12th century). A seal of Alexios Comnenos, dated to the years 1078–1081 during which he was Grand Domestic of the Occident (i.e., commander of the Western army) was discovered on the Tsarevets. It was most likely attached to a letter sent to the *strategos* residing there. Tărnovo began to grow after the mid-12th century, when it turned into an urban, but also industrial center with several workshops for metal processing, pottery and building materials. A new stone rampart was built, and dwellings appeared in the valley between the Tsarevets and the Trapezitsa hills now called *Asenova makhala*, as well as on the Momina Krepost hill.<sup>96</sup> After 1185, the erection of several political and religious buildings gave Tărnovo all the attributes of a capital city. The residence of the tsars was established on the Tsarevets hill, and the Trapezitsa fortress continued to be used by the civilian population throughout the entire history of the city.

Borislav Primov believed that Peter and Asan were local dignitaries who succeeded in attracting the population to their side and leading it to war. According to him, the center of the uprising was on the estates the two brothers owned in the environs of Tărnovo.<sup>97</sup> It is most likely that Peter and Asan dwelt in that city or that they owned properties in its hinterland.<sup>98</sup> But Ivan Dujčev's disagreed: Peter and Asan were local chiefs in the Stara Planina region.<sup>99</sup> Be as it may, the region of Tărnovo was indeed inhabited at one time by Vlachs from whom come several local place names (Bukurovo, Strâmți).<sup>100</sup>

Peter and Asan must have met with Emperor Isaac in Kypsella sometimes during the month of October 1185, because at that point the Byzantine army

95 Dintchev 1997.

96 Angelov 1984, 38; Popov 1985, 80; Dočev 2002, 673–676; Jordanov 2006, 219 (nr. 327); Jordanov 2009, 364 (nr. 1005); Dall'Aglio 2011b, 600–601; Barakov 2014a, 2–10; Barakov 2015, 117–124.

97 Primov 1971, 18. A similar opinion at Gagova 1986b, 195 (“Les habitants de Tărnovo se révoltèrent et proclamèrent les boyards locaux Petăr et Assen, rois”).

98 Jireček 1876, 225; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 105; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 56; Angelov 1984, 42; Angelov 1985, 7–8; Gagova 1986, 195; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 33–34; Murdzhev 2011, 69.

99 Dujčev 1952–1953, 229.

100 Giurescu 1931, 120; Năsturel 1996, 82.

had not yet reached Dimitritsi (a fact established beyond doubt by Günter Prinzing). However, the exact sequence of events remains uncertain. Ivan Dujčev made the first attempt to establish a chronology on the basis of the data from Niketas Choniates's history. He started from the mention of a solar eclipse during the second revolt of Alexios Vranas, which he dated to 1186 (in reality, as I will show below, that rebellion took place in 1187). The eclipse, according to Dujčev, must have been that of the April 21, 1186, but it is more likely that Choniates referred to that of September 4, 1187.<sup>101</sup> Dujčev argued that because the rebellion of Alexios Vranas started in February 1186, after his return from the campaign against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, Peter and Asan started must have risen in rebellion in December 1185 at the latest.<sup>102</sup> Charles Brand rejected this opinion, because the span of time between the battle of Dimitritsi and the beginning of the revolt was thus too short for the official announcement of the imperial wedding, and the subsequent collection of the taxes to justify the rebellion. Brand demonstrated that the revolt of Alexios Vranas may in fact be dated only between April and June 1187, because only in that period could have Conrad of Montferrat have squashed it. This chronological clue is beyond dispute.<sup>103</sup> That was why Brand dated the beginning of Peter and Asan's rebellion to the summer of 1186. The eclipse, according to him, must have been erroneously mentioned by Niketas Choniates as taking place during the revolt of Alexios Vranas. Brand's reasoning was correct, but its premise was that the meeting at Kypsella happened after the battle of Dimitritsi, and after the collection of taxes for the wedding, which is false. Genoveva Cankova-Petkova was of the same opinion, as she believed that Isaac II did not need any longer the military aid offered by Peter and Asan, after having won the battle against William II. Consequently, the rebellion of the two brothers must have started sometimes in the early 1186.<sup>104</sup> Phaidon Malingoudis proposed a chronology similar to that of Brand, in which the revolt broke out in the spring of 1186.<sup>105</sup>

Günter Prinzing, who dated the meeting of Kypsella before November 7, 1185, argued that the building of the place of prayer on the site of the future Church of St. Demetrios in Tärnovo must have been done but on the saint's feast. The icon stolen from Thessaloniki was taken to that building on the same occasion. The soothsayer episode must therefore have taken place in Tärnovo

101 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 384; transl. Magoulias, 211); Van Dieten 1971, 77; Malingoudis 1978, 117–121.

102 Dujčev 1952–1953, 231–232.

103 Brand 1968, 273–274 (accepted by Malingoudis 1978, 115).

104 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 98, 104–105. La fel, Angelov 1984, 44–45.

105 Malingoudis 1978, 113–114.

on October 26, 1185, shortly after the failed meeting with Isaac II and before his victory over William II. Had the victory been already obtained, it would have been difficult to convince the people of Tărnovo that Saint Demetrios had abandoned the Greeks.<sup>106</sup>

Prinzing's scenario is the most credible, but the place of prayer could not have been built on October 26, or shortly before that.<sup>107</sup> The time span was simply too short. What really mattered, in fact, was the presence of the icon brought from Thessaloniki. On the location of that improvised place of worship, probably a wooden building or perhaps even a tent, the Church of St. Demetrios was built after a while in the valley between the Tsarevets and the Trapezitsa hills, on the bank of the river Yantra, to the north of the fortification, of which the inner stone rampart mentioned above has been preserved. The place in the valley must have been chosen because the insurgents could not have gathered in any of the hilltop fortresses. Later, that site became sacred. The place of worship consecrated to Saint Demetrios was built on top of some pottery workshops. When the construction of the church began, a brick production workshop was built nearby (see Figure 1). By the early 13th century, the church with the area of 8.2 by 15.75 meters, was included into a monastery. Both monastery and church were damaged after the Ottoman conquest, and are now presently rebuilt with surviving architectural and pictorial elements.<sup>108</sup>

The rebellion against the power of Constantinople was that of a mountain population with some military training. Niketas Choniates noted that the rebels counted on numerous fortresses in Haemus Mountains, each place on abrupt cliffs.<sup>109</sup> The development of the region in which those mountain strongholds were located is marked by a sudden surge, in the area between Tărnovo and Šumen, in the number of coin finds dated to the second half of the 12th century.<sup>110</sup>

The military experience of the Vlachs and of the Bulgarians in the region of the Haemus and the Rhodopi Mountains was the result of their participation in the army of the Comnenian emperors. Several months prior to the

106 Prinzing 1999–2000, 257–265.

107 Lazăr 2009, 4 (and Lazăr 2011, 166) wrongly maintained that the church was built between 1183 and 1185, making a confusion with the issue date of the coins discovered there.

108 Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 106–112; Nikolova, Robov 2005, 22–98; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 219–222.

109 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 369; transl. Magoulias, 204; FHDR III, 254/255); Marinow 2006, 183.

110 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003a, 360.



FIGURE 1 *The Church of Saint Demetrios in Tărnovo, as now rebuilt.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

battle of Lebounion (April 29, 1091), where the Byzantine army won a great victory against the Pechenegs, Emperor Alexios I Comnenos ordered his general Nikephoros Melissenos to recruit Bulgarians and Vlachs for the imperial troops. Melissenos went to Ainos (Enez, at the mouth of Maritsa river), which suggests that the Vlachs in question lived southern Thrace, most likely



in the Rhodopi Mountains.<sup>111</sup> Vlach troops thus participated in the battle of Lebounion. At Isacceia, in northern Dobrudja, a seal was discovered of a certain Georgios, “*strategos* of the Vlachs”<sup>112</sup> and the commander of a Vlach *tagma*. The Vlachs of that *tagma* must have been recruited in the Haemus Mountains, as suggested by an episode that took place several years after the battle of Lebounion. In 1095, the Cumans invaded the Balkans bringing with them a claimant to the throne whom they regarded as Nikephoros Diogenes, the son of Emperor Romanos IV. Having infiltrated south of the Haemus, the Cumans were defeated by the Byzantine army. However, Alexios I, who was camped in Anchialos, learned that another group of Cumans had crossed the Danube. That information was brought to him by a leader of the Vlachs whom Anna Comnena calls Pudilos, a Greek version of a name that may have been Budilă or Bădilă. He probably was a *celnik* or some other type of chief of those Vlachs who lived between the Danube and the Haemus, and may have even had some position in the Byzantine army.<sup>113</sup>

The Vlachs of the Haemus Mountains belonged to a branch of the eastern population speaking a Romance language, of which the last relic is the Megleno-Romanian group in the Vardar valley, north of Thessaloniki, as long demonstrated by Gustav Weigand<sup>114</sup> and then confirmed by others.<sup>115</sup> The relation between Megleno-Romanian, on one hand, and Macedo-Romanian and Daco-Romanian, on the other hand, as well as the chronology of their separation are still a matter of debate.<sup>116</sup> However, it is by now generally accepted that the population inhabiting the area of the Haemus and the Rhodopi Mountains, which participated in the Vlach-Bulgarian rebellion that created the Second Bulgarian Empire spoke a language that belonged to the group known as Megleno-Romanian. Splinters from that group moved to the south at a later time, namely to the region of Almopia (Meglen) near the present-day border between Greece and Macedonia. Those people were the descendants of the Romanized population of Dacia Ripensis and Moesia Secunda. Traces of

111 Anna Comnena, VIII, 3.4 (ed. Leib, II, 135; transl. Sewter, 251; FHDR III, 108/109); Gyóni 1951, 241–243, 249–251; Asdracha 1976, 65, 69; Vásáry 2005, 20.

112 Barnea 2001, 103–104.

113 Anna Comnena, X, 2. 6 (ed. Leib, II, 193; transl. Sewter, 298; FHDR III, 114/115); Giurescu 1931, 118; Gyóni 1952, 502–503; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 155; Diaconu 1978, 57; Vásáry 2005, 21; Spinei 2006, 375–376.

114 Weigand 1908, 49–50.

115 Capidan 1925, 54–65; Ivănescu 1980, 309, 369; Scărlătoiu 1979, 32–34, 37; Scărlătoiu 1992, 11–15.

116 Atanasov 2001.

the Vlachs in the Haemus have survived around Sofia in the form of mountain toponyms such as *Cercel*, *Văcărel*, *Cerbul*, *Păsărel*, *Singurel*, and *Cârnul*.<sup>117</sup>

There were Vlachs in the Rhodopi as well, as indicated by the letter to Pope Innocent III written by the Latin emperor of Constantinople Henry I of Hainaut on June 5, 1205. In that letter, Adrianople is described as surrounded by mountains inhabited by *Blachi* (*civitas est Grecie munitissima, et montibus tantum interpositis Blachorum affinis populis*).<sup>118</sup> The Vlachs recruited for the 1091 campaign against the Pechenegs were coming from that same area. According to Basil II's chrysobull for the archbishopric of Ohrid (1019), in the early 11th century the Vlachs lived all across the whole Bulgaria. The latter name refers of course to the territory of Samuel's former empire.<sup>119</sup> In 1066, the Vlachs involved in the revolt of Larissa against Emperor Constantine X, are said to have moved their herds for summertime "to the Bulgarian Mountains," most obviously the Rhodopi, the Bulgarian mountains closest to Thessaly.<sup>120</sup> This suggests that the Vlach pastoralists lived and moved freely through all the highlands of the former Bulgarian state, and had no territory of their own, no country, such as that of Vlachs in as Thessaly. The *Vlachia* of the Haemus, as a country, was Peter and Asan's creation. There is no evidence to support the recent idea that the Vlachs came to the Haemus region in Moesia from Epirus or Thessaly in the late 11th century, in order to populate a region devastated by the Pecheneg wars.<sup>121</sup>

In the initial phase of the rebellion, the Vlachs must have played the main role, even though the Bulgarians who joined in had hope of restoring the old empire destroyed in 1018. In other words, the Bulgarians had a solid state tradition, while the Vlachs had none. The Bulgarian aristocracy (*boliali*, boyars) that survived under the Byzantine domination was linked to the past in a manner in which the Vlach nobility was not.<sup>122</sup> While the Bulgarian boyars aspired to restore the Bulgarian empire, the initial impetus of the movement aiming at doing just that was the joint work of Vlachs and Bulgarians.

Most sources highlight the decisive participation of the Vlachs in the revolt and the establishment of the new state and especially the Vlach origin of its leaders, the brothers Peter, Asan, and Johannitsa. For example, according to

117 Giurescu 1931, 119–120; Dragomir 1959, 11–15.

118 Brial, *Recueil*, 525 = PL, vol. 215, 707 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 51 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 366; Xenopol 1891, 281; Iorga 1937, 116.

119 Gelzer 1893, 46 (FHDR IV, 24/25).

120 Kekaumenos, c. 175 (transl. Beck, 118 = ed. Spadaro, 210/211; FGHB VII, 26; FHDR III, 30/31).

121 Stanev 2013, 216.

122 Angelov 1967, 153–154; Božilov 1978, 115–117.

Niketas Choniates a priest taken prisoner by the Vlachs in 1195 “asked Asan to let him go; and he asked for mercy speaking in his language as he knew the speech of the Vlachs.”<sup>123</sup> Choniates specifically mentions the Vlachs at several points in the narrative, and clearly distinguishes them from Bulgarians. It is true that George Akropolites recognized only the role played by the Bulgarians in the revolt, but he wrote in a period in which the state founded by the rebels had completely turned Bulgarian.<sup>124</sup>

The testimony of the Latin sources is also incontrovertible. Ansbertus’ account of the passage of the participants in the Third Crusade through the Byzantine Empire, calls Asan *Flacus*, and the *Flachs* or *Blachs* were the Vlachs, different from Bulgarians.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, French sources pertaining to the Fourth Crusade call Johannitsa *Blac* several times, and his country is called *Blaquie* or *Blakie*. Thus, in the work of Geoffroy de Villehardouin, the name of the country, *Blaquie* (*Blakie*) appears 40 times (in most of the cases in association with *Bougrie*, Bulgaria), besides other mentions of the *Blachs* as population;<sup>126</sup> Henri de Valenciennes mentions *li Blas*, or *Blascois* and the country *Blaquie*,<sup>127</sup> and Robert de Clari the names *Blaquie* and *Jehans li Blakis* (John the Vlach).<sup>128</sup> The name *Blac* or its derivatives also appear in other Western sources pertaining to the same events, as it will be seen in Chapter 6. The letter of Emperor Henry I of Hainaut (June 5, 1205) to Pope Innocent III mentions the Vlachs (*Blachi*) of Johannitsa (*Joannitius*).<sup>129</sup> Three decades later, Pope Gregory IX

123 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 468; transl. Magoulias, 257; FHDR III, 282/283). The fragment was first noticed by Xenopol 1891, 300. See also Brătescu 1919, 26; Bănescu 1943, 575; Malingoudis 1978, 93–94; Brezeanu 1989a, 43.

124 For his conception see Tanașoca 2003.

125 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 28, 33, 35, 56, 58, 69 (transl. Loud, 60, 64, 65, 83, 84, 94; FLHB III, 253, 257, 259, 277, 279, 290).

126 Geoffroy, c. 202, 273, 276, 311, 333, 335, 339, 345, 350, 352, 354, 371, 374, 386, 387, 389, 392, 394, 398, 404, 412–414, 416, 417, 420, 424, 442–444, 451, 459, 461, 472, 475, 488, 491, 497 (ed. Faral, I, 206; II, 82, 84, 120, 144, 150, 156, 160–164, 180, 182, 194–198, 202, 204, 208, 216, 224–230, 234, 236, 256–258, 264, 274, 276, 286, 290, 302, 306, 312; transl. Fluieraru, 97, 129, 130, 140, 146, 147, 150–152, 157, 161–165, 167, 169–173, 178, 179, 181, 183, 184, 187, 188, 192, 194).

127 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 504, 505, 509, 511, 515, 518, 519, 521, 529, 536, 539, 540, 548, 565, 601, 688 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 306–317, 320, 321, 323, 324, 326, 327, 331, 332, 342, 343, 366, 367, 416, 147; ed. Longnon, 28, 29, 31, 32, 35, 36, 40, 43, 44, 49, 58, 77, 118; trad. Fluieraru, 31–37, 39, 42, 43, 46, 52, 65, 93).

128 Robert de Clari, c. 21, 64, 65, 106, 112, 116 (ed. Lauer, 21, 63, 64, 101, 102, 106–108; transl. Fluieraru, 73, 119–121, 163, 169, 172).

129 Brial, *Recueil*, 525 = PL, vol. 215, 707 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 51–52 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 366.

called John Asan II *dominus Blachorum et Bulgariorum* in his letter of May 21, 1237.<sup>130</sup> By 1257 the enemies of the Latin Empire were the *Blachs* (see Chapter 9).

Pope Innocent III's references to the Roman origin of the *Blachs* are a special case: in a letter to Johannitsa, he declares that he has heard "that the lineage of your ancestors has its origins in the noble city of Rome" (*audito quod de nobili Urbis Romae prosapia progenitores tui originem traxerint*).<sup>131</sup> In other papal letters from 1202–1205 and 1213, the *Blachs* are mentioned alongside *Bulgarians*, and in some of them *Bulgaria* and *Blachia* appear as different countries.<sup>132</sup> In all those Latin sources, Bulgarians also appear with own their name, a clear indication that the terms *Blachi*, *Blaci* did not apply to them but to another ethnic group, namely the Vlachs.

In addition, the region of Thrace that witnessed heavy fighting in 1091 between the Pechenegs and the Byzantine army is called in *Heimskringla*, the work that the Icelandic historian and poet Snorri Sturlusson wrote ca. 1230, as *Blökumannaland*, the country of the Vlachs." This is of course an anachronism, as it probably reflects the situation in the early 13th century, when that region was part of Bulgaria under John Asan II.<sup>133</sup>

Judging from those sources, several historians, not all of them Romanian, admitted that the Vlachs led by Peter and Asan initiated the revolt, or at least had the main role in the unfolding events.<sup>134</sup> Those who deny any Vlach par-

130 Hurmuzachi, Densușianu 1887, 159 (nr. CXIX) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 660, (nr. 3694) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 302 (nr. 226) = FLHB IV, 55.

131 PL, vol. 214, 825 (n. CCLXVI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 1 (doc. I) = FLHB III, 308; Wolff 1949, 190–192, 201–202; Brătianu 1980, 75–78; Tanașoca 1981, 582; Armbruster 1993, 33–34; Vásáry 2005, 26–27.

132 PL, vol. 214, 1112–1115 (n. CXV, CXVI), 1117 (n. CXIX); vol. 215, 277 (n. I), 287 (n. IV), 293 (n. VIII), 294 (n. IX), 295–297 (n. XI, XII, XIII), 411 (n. CXXVI), 513 (n. CCLIII), 551 (n. CCXXX), 698 (n. CXXV), 706 (n. CXXIX), 710 (n. CXXXII); vol. 216, 825 (n. XXX) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 3 (doc. III), 6 (doc. V), 17–22 (doc. XV–XVII), 32–36 (doc. XXII–XXIV, XXVI, XXVII), 38, (doc. XXIX), 40 (doc. XXXI), 48 (doc. XXXIV), 54 (doc. XXXVIII), 55 (doc. XXXIX) = FLHB III, 309, 311, 313, 316, 323, 326–329, 334, 335, 340–342, 345, 346, 348, 358, 362, 363, 368.

133 Pintescu 1999, 41–61; Spinei 2006, 143–144. Other historians attributed the events in the *Heimskringla* to the attack of 1122, but even with a changed chronology the territory in question was part of the Second Bulgarian Empire in 1230 (Diaconu 1978, 72–77; Bløndal 1981, 148–151; Meško 2007, 9–13). The idea that *Blökumannaland* refers the 1114 expedition of the Byzantine army north of the Danube must be rejected, for no major battle in that campaign is mentioned that would match the description in *Heimskringla* (Gyóni 1956, 303–311; Horedt 1969, 180–181; Mărculeț 2010c, 585–594).

134 Höfler 1879, 234–245; Xenopol 1891, 284, 297–301; Wolff 1949, 180–181; Ostrogorsky 1956, 427; Vasiliev 1958, 441–443; Malingoudis 1978, 89–100, 132; Angold 1984, 273; Cheynet 1990,

ticipation are exclusively Bulgarian historians, and their main reason to do so is the chauvinistic attitude that survived the political upheavals after World War II, and flourished even under the Communist regime. By the same token, however, one cannot deny that Peter and Asan established a state, which restored the political tradition of the Bulgarian Empire destroyed in 1018. That state was the Second *Bulgarian* Empire, which at its apogee, was the greatest power in Southeastern Europe. Peter and Asan could not have established a Vlach or Romanian state, because there were no Vlach or Romanian state traditions. As Alexandru Xenopol put it,

As long as what was needed was resistance, as long as the new state had to put up an energetic fight to survive, the pastoralists in the Haemus mountains were the only, but also most powerful solution. But when the state was organized, it was the Bulgarians who took over, for they were more cultivated than the Romanians [Vlachs]: they had their own church with its established hierarchy, the existence of which had been acknowledged even by Greeks, when the latter destroyed the First Bulgarian Empire; they also had a written language and a state organization harkening back at the First Empire. The semi-nomadic Romanians [Vlachs] in the Haemus lacked all those elements . . . As long as the Vlach-Bulgarian state remained restricted to the mountain region, the Romanian [Vlach] element prevailed.<sup>135</sup>

To that, one can add George Murnu's remarks:

From the battles carried out by the Asanids—the fatal result of the political tradition—an independent Bulgaria was born, a state which did not have a Romanian national character, but a Slavic, Bulgarian one; this was

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450; Soustal 1991, 99; Fine 1994, 12–13; Runciman 1995, 13; Treadgold 1997, 657; Stephenson 2000, 288–294; Magdalino 2008, 655–656; Ritter 2010, 34–35; Ritter 2013, 174.

135 Xenopol 1891, 302: “Tant qu’il fallut opposer de la résistance, tant que le nouvel État eut besoin de la lutte énergique pour s’affirmer, ce furent les pasteurs du mont Hémus qui donnèrent le plus puissant contingent. Mais, lorsque l’État dut être organisé, ce furent les Bulgares qui prirent le dessus. Ceux-ci étaient plus cultivés que les Roumains; ils possédaient leur Église avec une hiérarchie établie, qui avait été respectée même par les Grecs lorsque ceux-ci avaient renversé leur premier État; ils avaient une langue écrite et un État organisé au temps même de leur premier empire; tous ces éléments manquaient au peuple de pasteurs à moitié nomades des Roumains de l’Hémus (. . .) Tant que l’État valacho-bulgare resta enfermé dans les montagnes, l’élément roumain fut prépondérant.”

the result of the previous reign of the tsars Symeon and Samuel, the only legitimate and possible form of state in their view.<sup>136</sup>

Much like the Bulgars established after 680 a state in Moesia with a large Slavic and Romanic (Romance-speaking) population, the Vlachs created a second empire with a considerable majority of Bulgarians. The Bulgars were eventually Slavicized and their state, while keeping the name of the conquerors, lost all non-Slavic (Turkic) traits of its founders. Similarly, the Vlachs gradually lost the predominant position in the new state created together with the Bulgarians.

Borislav Primov gave a fair assessment of this historical phenomenon:

Until now the Asanids were considered either as coming from an old Bulgarian boyar family, or being of Russian-Cuman, Cuman, Vlach or Bulgarian-Vlach origin. However, their ethnic origin has little importance for their actions and achievements as leaders of the population from Bulgaria and from the territories north of the Danube where they had allies and exercised influence. (...) It is obvious that those authors who insist upon the Vlach origin of the dynasty did so in order to attribute to the state, at least in part, a Vlach character, while those authors who denied it were simply denying the historical role of the Vlachs. It is hard to presume that, on the basis of the sources known until now, the ethnic origin of the Asanids will ever be precisely known. We may admit the hypothesis which in my opinion is closer to the truth, according to which they were of a mixed origin with ancestors among both the Bulgarian and the Vlach populations of the Balkan Mountains.<sup>137</sup>

More recently, Francesco Dall'Aglio commented upon the relation between the ethnicity of the founders and their political options:

The hypothesis that the Asenids were of Vlach or Cuman descent is entirely consistent; but whichever their personal ethnic affiliation, since the beginning of the uprising Petăr and Asen drew on the tradition of the first Bulgarian kingdom. Their idea of nation was inclusive, voluntaristic, not merely grounded in an ethnic allegiance: just as the idea of nation of Boris and Simeon. Judging from the sources, the new kingdom was intrinsically multiethnic, as it was common during the Middle Ages when

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136 Murnu 1984, 135.

137 Primov 1971, 16, 17. A similar opinion at Kojčeva 1993, 128–129.

ethnic differences were not, as a general rule, perceived to be unsurmountable and did not preclude the possibility of a peaceful coexistence of different populations within the same territory, as long as some general rules and practices (usually of a religious nature) were respected. But in every state, however multiethnic, there is always some basic set of cultural references which tends to be an unifying factor: in this occasion it was the reference to the old Bulgarian kingdom, a prestigious antecedent. Questioning the actual ethnic origin of the Asenides is irrelevant. The important thing is that they chose to think of themselves as Bulgarians, just as Boris did.<sup>138</sup>

The name of the youngest brother, “little John” (*Ioniță*), demonstrates that the brothers who started the revolt were Vlachs. The diminutive is Vlach and is not attested among speakers of Bulgarian. That that was the way in which the name was pronounced is attested beyond dispute in Latin (*Joannitius*) and French sources (*Joannice* or *Johanisses*), but also in Pseudo-Kodinos. There is no support in the sources for the form *Ivanitsa* invented by some Bulgarian historians only to give Johannitsa a Bulgarian origin. Similarly groundless is the bizarre idea that the Asanid brothers were descendants from a group of (Turkic-speaking) Bulgars, who had resisted Slavicization until the 12th century.<sup>139</sup> There is of course no evidence that such a group ever existed. On the other hand, that the three brothers were of mixed Vlach-Cuman origin is quite possible.<sup>140</sup> The Cuman name *Asan* was given to the son of a man with an elevated social status among the Vlachs, because only such a person may have wished to give his son such a prestigious, foreign name. The Cumans lived for a while together with the Vlachs, for example in the Meglen region, probably after the raid of 1122 that reached Thrace. In that raid, warriors are said to have come together with their families, and it is possible that Cuman women taken captive after the Byzantine victory at Beroe (Stara Zagora) eventually married local Vlachs. Those Cumans became pronoiars and occupied the plains previously held by the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, as indicated by a prostaxis of Emperor Andronikos for the benefit of the Lavra Monastery at

138 Dall’Aglío 2011b, 599–600. See also Dall’Aglío 2013, 308.

139 Dimitrov 1993, 103.

140 Some authors admitted only a Bulgarian-Cuman origin, or a pure Cuman one. For instance: Malingoudis 1978, 83–88; Gjuzelev 1979, 77; Gjuzelev 1987, 112; Stoyanov 2002, 683; Vásáry 2005, 41 (“a Cuman dynasty whose members became Vlachs in the twelfth century and Bulgars in the thirteenth”); Brüggemann 2007–2008, 70. A Pecheneg origin was supposed by Stanev 2013, 213.

Mount Athos (February 1184).<sup>141</sup> There is also archaeological evidence of the presence of a Cuman population around Pliska, not far from Tărnovo.<sup>142</sup>

One may therefore conclude that Peter, Asan and Johannitsa were the sons of a Vlach man from the Haemus region, a person whose superior social status most probably derived from his herds, the usual way to measure fortune among the Vlachs. It is also possible that Peter and Asan were in military service in charge with a horse farm. It is not known when were they born, but Peter, the eldest, may have been in his when the revolt broke out.

Paisij of Hilandar imagined that Peter and Asan were descendants from tsar Gabriel Radomir, who was supposedly banished to Walachia (the land of the Romanians north of the river Danube) by John Vladislav. From Walachia, they came to Tărnovo to answer the call of a certain John, whom Paisij made Patriarch of the Bulgarians.<sup>143</sup> The date given for that return corresponds to AD 1170, and under the protection of Saint Demetrios, to whom the church then erected was dedicated, the two brothers led the revolt against the Greeks. According to Paisij, Patriarch John crowned Asan as emperor, and Peter was given the command of the army.<sup>144</sup> There is of course no support in the existing sources for any of those claims, but one cannot miss the direct link established here between the rulers of the First and those of the Second Bulgarian Empire. As the title of tsar had to be bestowed on the emperor by someone, Paisij invented a patriarch, a position in the Bulgarian church hierarchy that appeared only in 1235. Paisij apparently knew nothing about possessed soothsayers prompting ordinary people to rise in rebellion. Whether he deliberately ignored that details remains unclear. Being a monk, he would have kept silent such a horror thing.

However, he was not the only one attempting to link the Asanids to the rulers of the First Bulgarian Empire. As mentioned above, at about the same time as Paisij, George Șincai claimed that Samuel and the tsars ruling after him were Vlachs, and that Peter and Asan descended from that same family. Later, both Xenopol and Iorga seriously considered the possibility that Samuel and his family were, at least in part, of Vlach origin, because of coming from

141 Lemerle, Guillou, Svoronos, Papachryssanthou 1970, 341–345 (nr. 66); Anastasijević, Ostrogorsky 1951, 22–29; Brand 1968, 88; Malingoudis 1978, 85–86; Angold 1984, 273; Ritter 2010, 28; Bartusis 2013, 55–58.

142 Brüggemann 2007–2008, 68–69.

143 It could be a confusion with John Comnenos, who took part at a council in 1157 with the title of archbishop of Iustiniana Prima and of the whole Bulgaria (Tăpkova-Zaimova 2008, 32).

144 *Paisij*, 85–86, 89–90.



Macedonia.<sup>145</sup> To be sure, Gabriel Radomir's mother was from Larissa, a town with a historically documented Vlach population in the 11th century. One of Emperor John Vladislav's sons was called Trajan (*Traian*), a name most likely taken from a Romance population.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, that the Asanids were descendants from Samuel's family on the female line is not impossible.<sup>147</sup>

Let us now return to the unfolding of the events. As shown above, the rebellion broke out in Tărnovo in November or December 1185, following which the Vlachs and the Bulgarians attacked the Byzantine strongholds in the Haemus Mountains, taking advantage of the small number of troops in each one of them (many soldiers may have been moved against William II). A scholium in one of the manuscripts of Niketas Choniates's work explains that the rebels went "beyond the so-called *Zygos*,"<sup>148</sup> a name which also appears in the oration that John Syropoulos delivered probably on January 6, 1188,<sup>149</sup> in those delivered in 1193 by George Tornikes II and Constantine Stilbes,<sup>150</sup> as well as in Euthymios Tornikes's funeral oration for his father Demetrios.<sup>151</sup> The same range of mountains is called *Zygos* in Anna Comnena's account of the attack of 1095 mentioned above. According to Anna Comnena, the Vlachs showed the Cuman invaders the passes through those specific mountains:

As it happened the Cumans were shown the way through the passes by the Vlachs and so crossed the *Zygom* without any trouble. As soon as they approached Goloë the inhabitants threw into chains the commander of the garrison and handed him over to them. In fact they gladly welcomed the Cumans.<sup>152</sup>

The name *Zygos* is Greek and means, among other things, "yoke" or "chain." This was a most appropriate name for the mountains otherwise known as *Haemos*,

145 Xenopol 1891, 301; Iorga 1937, 7–8.

146 The name *Traian* is recorded by Ioannes Scylitzes, ed. Thurn, 360 (transl. Flusin, 300); Riso 1990, 206–207; Strässle 2006, 158, 333.

147 Tanaşoca 1981, 591; Tanaşoca 2001, 130.

148 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 372; transl. Magoulias, 205; FHDR III, 256/257).

149 Ioannes Syropoulos, 17; Stephenson 2000, 291; Ritter 2010, 55; Ritter 2013, 190. The editor of the source and other historians dated it to 1192 or 1193, but the latest studies proved that the speech could not be delivered later than 1188.

150 Georgios Tornikes II, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 277 (FHDR III, 394/395); Constantin Stilbes, ed. Browning, 39.

151 Euthymios Tornikes, ed. Darrouzès, 100 (FHDR III, 380/381–382/383).

152 Anna Comnena, x, 3.1 (ed. Leib, II, 194; transl. Sewter, 299; FHDR III, 114/115).

a word which means the same thing in the Thracian language.<sup>153</sup> However, Anna Comnena applies the same name to the range of mountains between Niš and Skopje, the limit between Dalmatia and the territory under Byzantine control.<sup>154</sup> The mountain passes defended by the Vlachs, through which the Cumans went, were most certainly in the Stara Planina. Those mountains are in fact “the chain of the world” (*Catena Mundi*) in 16th-century sources.<sup>155</sup> The analysis of George Pachymeres’s use of the word *Zygos* suggests that he sometimes applied that name to the Strandža range in southeastern Thrace, and other times to the Stara Planina.<sup>156</sup> The Haemus were also called *Zygos* by the archbishop of Ohrid, Demetrios Chomatenos, in 1219.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, in reference to the march towards Preslav of the Byzantine troops under the command of Basil Monachos, the duke of the theme of Bulgaria, who in 1053 moved against the Pechenegs, Michael Attaliates, writing in 1080, described the duke taking “his large army over the highest hill, a true border between Macedonia and the lands close to the Danube, called by this reason *Zygós* by the local inhabitants, and which has many gorges called *klisurai* in popular language.”<sup>158</sup> The “highest hill” is obviously the Stara Planina, the tallest range of mountains in the region. The target of the attack of the Vlachs and Bulgarians in 1185 or 1186 was Preslav, east of Tărnovo. Preslav had been the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, and taking that city must have had a symbolic significance, for its possession linked the rebels to the Bulgarian state tradition. Not being able to besiege the city, the rebels gave up for the moment their plans of occupying Preslav. Nevertheless, they boldly crossed the Haemus, and plundered many cities in Thrace, plundering from which they took many prisoners.<sup>159</sup>

Both Michael Attaliates and Anna Comnena use the term “gorge” (*κλεισοῦρα*) in reference to an older form of Byzantine military organization in the mountain region. The first *kleisourai* were set up in the 7th and 8th centuries in the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire, and many subsequently (during the 9th and 10th centuries) turned into small themes. Their commanders, the *kleisourarchoi*, were under the direct command of the emperor. In the European part

153 Kojčeva 2000, 84.

154 Anna Comnena, IX, 4.3 (ed. Leib, II, 167; transl. Sewter, 276).

155 Gyóni 1952, 500–502; Beševliev 1970, 73; Kojčeva 2000, 86.

156 Pachymeres, III, 18, VI, 3, VI, 19, VII, 29, XI, 28 (ed. Failler, I, 278/279; II, 550/551, 588/589; III, p. 92/93; IV, p. 490/491; FGH B X, 154, 172, 181, 185); Asdracha 1975, 138–140; Soustal 1991, 280; Kojčeva 2000, 85–86; Vásáry 2005, 83.

157 Demetrios Chomatenos, 423 (nr. 146).

158 Michael Attaliates, ed. Pérez Martín, 29 (FHDR, III, 68/69); Gagova 1986a, 83.

159 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 372; transl. Magoulias, 205; FHDR III, 256/257).

of the empire, the first known *kleisoura* was organized in 688 in the valley of the river Strymon, in Macedonia, in the aftermath of Justinian II's defeat at the hands of the Bulgars, somewhere in a mountain pass near Philippopolis. After the mid-11th century, new *kleisourai* appeared in Mesembria and Sozopolis, as indicated by the seals of their commanders. At this point in time, apparently, the term ceased to be used for mountain districts, and was extended to all small border areas. The Greek word derives from Latin (*clausura*). In the 6th century, a *clausura* or *kleisoura* was just a gorge, but beginning with the 7th century, the word referred to the military unit stationed there to protect the gorge or the mountain pass. From the Byzantine Greek, the word *kleisoura* was then borrowed by speakers of Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, and Vlach dialects; it is still documented in such place names as like Clisura Dunării (Banatska Klisura, in Serbian), a region in southern Banat, and Vlachoklisoura, a town in northern Greece.<sup>160</sup> John Asan II's charter of 1230 granting privileges to the merchants of Ragusa mentions *kleisourai* along with fairs, as distinct areas and special places for trade.<sup>161</sup>

Judging from Anna Comnena's description, the Vlachs who showed the way to the Cumans of 1095 must have lived not far from Riš, the mountain pass closes to Goloe, present-day Lozarevo.<sup>162</sup> It is quite possible that the Vlachs in question were in fact a military unit stationed in that pass, i.e., a *kleisoura*. The attack of 1095 revealed the importance of blocking the mountain passes giving access to the main routes leading to Constantinople. That must have been the reason for which Alexios I went at great lengths to secure the loyalty of the mountain population. Historians have long emphasized the role, ever since the mid-8th century, that the Stara Planina range played as an effective military barrier both for the Bulgar(ian) power in the north and for the Byzantine army in the south.<sup>163</sup> In 1186, those same mountains became the base of operation for the rebels. Many of their early victories were obtained in mountain passes (*kleisourai*) that they would have been otherwise expected to defend on behalf of the Byzantine authorities.

Following the rebels' attacks on Thrace, Emperor Isaac II decided to take action. His strategic objective was to restore control over the passes across the Stara Planina (Haemus). However, the Byzantine army was ambushed several times in "places troublesome and difficult to go through." In an oration delivered, according to recent opinions, in mid-1186, Michael Choniates specifically

160 Madgearu 2013a, 16–17, 45.

161 Petkov 2008, 483; Biliarsky 2008b, 263–264; Biliarsky 2011, 359.

162 The identification at Soustal 1991, 271.

163 Kojčeva 2000, 89.

mentions the rebels as taking position in the woods and in the mountains, and blocking the passes.<sup>164</sup> The Byzantine army carried out search operations through the woods (some of which were set on fire), and obtained a decisive victory in one of the passes, the location of which remains unknown. That victory was made possible by means of a surprise attack at a time of darkness (σκότος). The latter does not seem to refer to night, but to some unusual “darkness,” which may have been caused by the eclipse of April 21, 1186.<sup>165</sup> If so, then it is also possible that the Byzantines had planned the attack accordingly, since they could foresee eclipses. Be as it may, this bit of information offers a precise chronological clue for the campaign starting in early April 1186. Consequently, the rebels must have taken advantage of the winter months, when attacking Thrace in January, February, and March of that same year.

The victory in the unnamed pass is also mentioned by John Syropulos. In this context, Peter is said to have destroyed the *Zygos*, which can only refer to his breaking the defensive system of the Stara Planina. Comparing Peter with a bull breaking the yoke (*zygos*), and Asan with a stubborn mule, Syropoulos duly predicted that both rebels would eventually yield to the emperor.<sup>166</sup>

With the victory secured in the mountain pass, the Byzantine soldiers retreated from the territory they had attacked, after setting on fire “crops gathered in heaps, an indication that the campaign must have lasted well into the summer months of 1186. Meanwhile, while some of the rebels gave up, others ran across the Danube to get help from the Cumans. They mustered many warriors on horseback with whom they now returned to Moesia, a region from which the Byzantine army had just withdrawn.<sup>167</sup>

The Cumans were a formidable military power at that time. Their “empire of the steppe”, extended from the Bărăgan to the Volga, but consisted of

164 Ritter 2010, 41–42; Ritter 2013, 180–182.

165 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 372; transl. Magoulias, 206; FHDR III, 256/257); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, B, Θ (ed. Van Dieten, 7, 92; FHDR III, 336/337–338/339, 348/349); Michael Choniates, 67–73 (ed. Lambros, 247–249); Bachmann 1935, 74–76; Van Dieten 1971, 67–73; Malingoudis 1978, 76; Stephenson 2000, 290, 291; Marinow 2006, 185–186; Ritter 2010, 42–43; Ritter 2013, 182. On the contrary, Cankova-Petkova 1980, 57 considered that it was a meteorologic phenomenon, not an eclipse.

166 Ioannes Syropulos, 17, 33; Bachmann 1935, 94; Kazhdan 1965, 167–168; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 112–113; Stephenson 2000, 290–291; Ritter 2010, 54–55.

167 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 373–374; transl. Magoulias, 206; FHDR III, 336/337–338/339, 348/349); Akropolites, 11 (ed. Heisenberg, 18–19; transl. Macrides, 133; FHDR III, 396/397–398/399); Diaconu 1978, 115; Vásáry 2005, 17, 42; Lazár 2006, 17; Marinow 2006, 194–195; Dall’Aglío 2008–2009, 34; Spinei 2009, 139; Dall’Aglío 2013, 309; Ritter 2013, 183.

several autonomous territories controlled by different chieftains.<sup>168</sup> Like all other nomads, the Cumans were excellent horsemen, and every single raid into Byzantium that they had organized in 1095, 1114, 1122, 1148, 1154, and 1161 was successful.<sup>169</sup> It seems that at least some of Cumans who participated in the attacks of 1186 were, like those with whom the rebels returned from the lands north of the river Danube, not from the southern region of present-day Romania, but from the steppe lands farther to the east. That much results from the testimony of the Russian chronicles, according to which when the Rus' attacked the Cumans in 1187, they found the fortifications of the Cumans on the left bank of the Dnieper completely deserted. This seems to indicate that the Cumans had gone to the Balkans.<sup>170</sup>

In 1191, Eustathios, Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, described the manner in which the Cumans attacked:

The mob of Scythians does not even get to invade the land laying in front of it, that it already begins to withdraw if someone confronts it with boldness and, turning back their sight, they start running. They barely approach, then they retreat in a bolt. They grab something, but even before they fill their hands with booty, they grab the reins and spur their horses, sometimes with the heels, sometimes with the whip. And they leave themselves to the wind, praying that they fly faster than the hawks. They were not even seen, that they already hide from the sight of those who look at them.<sup>171</sup>

Why did the Cumans respond so quickly to the rebels' demands for help? To be sure, there already was a long tradition of cooperation with both Pechenegs and the Cumans, which had been established during the secession of 1072–1091. At that time Dristra (present-day Silistra) was controlled by the Pecheneg chief Tatos, and many Pechenegs and Cumans came from over the Danube to participate in the fighting.<sup>172</sup> Some have rightly pointed out that without the assistance of the Cumans, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians would have eventually failed in their attempts.<sup>173</sup> Confronted with a well-organized and strong

168 Diaconu 1978, 95; Pritsak 1982, 342–368; Vásáry 2005, 7, 32; Spinei 2006, 393.

169 For these attacks see Madgearu 2013a, 142–147, 150–153.

170 Spinei 2006, 408; Spinei 2009, 140.

171 Eustathios, 44 (FHDR III, 180/181).

172 Madgearu 2013a, 79–82, 131–132, 137–139.

173 Malingoudis 1978, 103–105; Angold 1984, 274; Papacostea 1993, 19, 22; Fine 1994, 11; Tanaşoca 2001, 130–131; Lazăr 2004–2006, 56; Ritter 2010, 81.

army, they did not stand a chance without military support from the Cumans. It is of course possible that together with the Cumans, Vlachs (Romanians) from the lands north of the Danube also decide to lend a hand,<sup>174</sup> especially if one accepts the idea that the eagerness of the Cumans to help implies that there had been previous contacts between them and the leaders of the revolt.<sup>175</sup> The light cavalry of the Cumans, in combination with the pedestrian troops of the Vlachs and of the Bulgarians offered more maneuverability to the force running an offensive war against the Byzantine army, as illustrated fully by subsequent campaigns. The Cuman cavalry became the shock force in those military confrontations, especially in the battle of Adrianople on April 14, 1205.<sup>176</sup>

According to Genoveva Cankova-Petkova, one of George Tornikes II's orations in which Emperor Isaac II is praised for having stirred conflict between Peter and his two brothers must be interpreted as an indication that Peter, who remained within the Byzantine territory, had accepted a truce.<sup>177</sup> However, Alexander Kazhdan has convincingly demonstrated that the oration in question was delivered in the fall of 1193, and that it therefore referred to circumstances to be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>178</sup> Much more relevant in the present context regard is the emperor's letter to the patriarch of Constantinople, which was drawn up by Niketas Choniates in October 1187. The main point of that letter is that Peter turned to the Cumans:

Peter, the man truly possessed by demons, the one that, to the misfortune of the barbarians, dwellers of the Haemus, was born, raised and sought for rebellion, unrightfully, after having then escaped punishment and unexpectedly saved himself (...) crossing the Danube (...) conjoined with men no better than pigs, with the Scythians, telling them what he wanted, namely: my Lordship turned back and the Greek army returned home and, as guardian to the fortresses of the Haemus region only one garrison was left, a squad which cannot be confronted by the people there and that, if they came to help, it will not be enough. Moreover, he promised them a pay (so big that the barbarians agreed and liked it) and that they will sneak without toil through the valleys of the Haemus and

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174 Iosipescu 1994, 258–260.

175 Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 32.

176 Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 41.

177 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 109–110; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 61. The oration in Georgios Tornikes II, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 264–265 (FHDR III, 386/387–388/389).

178 Kazhdan 1965, 173–174.

that the Iron Gates (Πύλας τὰς Σιδηρᾶς, Sidera = Riš pass<sup>179</sup>) will open too and they will pass without hindrance across the Great Wall<sup>180</sup> and that through this pass so narrow and hard to cross they will come out in a wide place, will conquer the countries of my Lordship and will chop with their swords the fields of the Greeks and will loot their goods, without remunerating the road guides nor giving them any wages (...). This promised and told Peter to the Scythians. (...) In a number of several thousands, they crossed the Haemus and jumped on our cities at the feet of the mountains. As road guides and battle allies they had those Vlachs (...), pagan and rotten kin (...). So, they loot whatever comes on their way, they perpetrate all kinds of bad things, killing, crumpling, and setting everything on fire. And, in their invasion on our land that moves quicker than rumors, they do not find anybody bold enough to stand against them, they spread out also on the estates in the plains, and devastate part of them.<sup>181</sup>

There are several important points in this letter. First, Peter goes to the Cumans to call upon them to attack once again the lands south of the Danube, in which they could plunder at will. Nothing is said about Asan, but it may be inferred that he stayed back at the head of the rebellion, together with those Vlachs who, just as in 1095, now guided the Cumans through the passes of the Stara Planina. Second, the emphasis is on the poor defense that consists of only one garrison which could have been stationed at Tărnovo. At any rate, Tărnovo must have been conquered by the Byzantine army, because it was from that city that the Byzantines recovered the icon of Saint Demetrios stolen from Thessaloniki.

In his *History*, Niketas Choniates criticized the emperor for not consolidating the victory by means of stationing garrisons in the strongholds of Moesia, which could thus serve as support points to the rebels.<sup>182</sup> In other words, Isaac II made one of the most serious mistakes a commander could make,

179 The identification at Soustal 1991, 441. Sometimes located at Demir Kapija (Kotel), the pass linked Tărnovo and Sliven.

180 The fortified line between the Black Sea (Evcik) and the Sea of Marmara (Silivri) was 45 km long, and secured the deep protection of Constantinople. The Long (or Great) Wall was built after the attack of the Huns of 447. It was overrun by the Kutrigurs in 559 and by the Avars in 626, then restored by Basil II during the war against Bulgaria (Külzer 2008, 507–509; A. Madgearu, *Wall of Thrace*, in OEMWMT, III, 425).

181 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, B (ed. Van Dieten, 7–9; FHDR III, 338/339–340/341).

182 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 394; transl. Magoulias, 217; FHDR III, 262/263).

namely to underestimate the enemy. He believed that the victory was irreversible and that the rebels had fled in fear; he had no clue that they were in fact preparing a counterattack together with the Cumans. According to Choniates, he was “deceived by the deceitful words of those who came to pay their respects.” In the absence of the Byzantine forces (a catastrophic mistake, or so believed Borislav Primov<sup>183</sup>), the rebels together with a great number of Cumans, took over the strategic initiative, and launched a counteroffensive in the fall of 1186. Judging by the same letter of October 1187, it appears that Peter had the means to pay the Cumans. This, in turn, suggests that the first attacks that the rebels led into Thrace in the Spring of 1186 were fruitful, and that they have stumbled upon considerable riches. The direction of the new attack of the Vlachs, Bulgarians and Cumans is quite clear: from Preslav through the Riš pass, the gates of which opened access to Beroe and from there to Adrianople and Constantinople. The opening of the gates at the Riš pass is not necessarily a metaphor. It is possible that access was blocked in the pass by means of a gate, much like in the Trayanova Vrata pass. There, a Roman fortification located near modern Ikhtiman, on the road from Sofia to Philippopolis, continued to be used during the Middle Ages to control the pass.<sup>184</sup>

According to Robert de Clari, John (Asan) turned to the Cumans and worked hard to convince them to become his friends. They eventually were ready to help him “and it was as though he was their lord.”<sup>185</sup> Of course, the lord in question was Peter, not Johannitsa. That may explain why the Cuman reinforcements were used to push farther the secessionist aspirations of the Vlach leader. This is the toparchy of Moesia mentioned by Choniates: “They were not content merely to preserve their own possessions and to assume control of the government of Mysia; they also were compelled to wreak havoc against the Roman territories and unite the political power (δυναστείαν) of Mysia and Bulgaria into one empire as of old.” It is worth noting, if only in passing, that when Choniates shows that after calling the Cumans for assistance, the Vlachs returned to their “homeland (in) Moesia” (ἐς τὴν πατρίδα Μυσίαν), that implies that in his eyes, that territory belonged to the Vlachs.<sup>186</sup> In other words, Choniates took seriously the initial request of autonomy, and went as far as to explain the rebellion in such terms. He therefore acknowledged that Moesia belonged to the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, when claiming that “it was

183 Primov 1971, 19.

184 Jireček 1877, 31–33; Soustal 1991, 190; Băjenaru 2010, 144–145.

185 Robert de Clari, c. 65 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 120).

186 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, 1 (ed. Van Dieten, 374; transl. Magoulias, 206; FHDR III, 258/259).



theirs.” Moreover, Niketas Choniates knew that the Vlachs and the Bulgarians used to have jointly a state, and that could only be what is now known as the First Bulgarian Empire. As a consequence, the secessionist aspirations quickly turned into a desire to restore the old Bulgarian empire, which of course included more than just Moesia. To Niketas Choniates, the latter was Vlachia, since he used the archaic name of Moesians for the Vlachs, whom he regarded as the natives of the region between the Danube and the Haemus: “the barbarians of the mount Haemus, who before were called Moesians and now they are called Vlachs.” Choniates therefore believed that the Vlachs, and not the Bulgarians were the native population of Moesia.<sup>187</sup>

Taking advantage of the absence of the Byzantine troops and of their alliance with the Cumans, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians successfully secured the separation from Byzantium of a country that the Byzantines called Vlachia. As the Vlachs did not use that ethnic name for themselves, it is not known what name they had for that territory. Nonetheless, to outsiders that was Vlachia, with only Niketas Choniates calling it Moesia for literary effect. Moreover, Robert de Clari makes it clear that *Blakia* and Cumania had a common border, which means that Vlachia was a region with the Danube as its northern border; the Haemus Mountains (Stara Planina) constituted the southern limit.<sup>188</sup> That was the region that Niketas Choniates called “toparchy of Moesia.” Its extent is clear from one of George Akropolites’s commentaries: “one Asan raised and made himself emperor over the country, conquering all the land between the Haemus and the Istros.”<sup>189</sup> To Robert de Clari, Vlachia was a strong country, enclosed by mountains through which there was only one passage.<sup>190</sup> If one takes this description at face value, it would mean that Vlachia was between two mountain ranges, the Stara Planina and the Rhodopi. In reality, the power center of the Vlach-Bulgarian state was to the north from the Stara Planina, at Târnovo. On the other hand, there are several passes across the Stara Planina, and not just one. Robert de Clari’s description is not based on first knowledge of the area, for he never got that far from Constantinople. The description was simply meant to render the idea of an inaccessible country inhabited by people that were very hard to defeat. Geoffroy de Villehardouin also mentions the mountain of Vlachia, which is clearly the Stara Planina. In relation to that mountain he mentions a fortress named Eului, which was “at the foot of the

187 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 368; transl. Magoulias, 204; FHDR III, 254/255); Brezeanu 1989a, 47–53.

188 Robert de Clari, c. 65 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 120); Vásáry 2005, 27.

189 Akropolites, c. 11 (ed. Heisenberg, 18; transl. Macrides, 133; FHDR III, 398/399).

190 Robert de Clari, c. 64 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 120).

mountain" (*al pié de la montagne de Blaquie*). Eului was most probably present-day Gorno Aleksandrovo.<sup>191</sup>

There can be no surprise that the geographic imprecision of the sources led to a great variety of scholarly opinions about the exact location of *Vlachia*. The geographer Constantin Brătescu believed Vlachia to be an area closer to the Black Sea, but he was certainly wrong when calling it White Vlachia, on the basis of an erroneous interpretation of the old Du Cange edition of Geoffroy de Villehardouin's work.<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, Constantin C. Giurescu located the Vlachia on both sides of the Haemus Mountains, stretching all the way to the Danube.<sup>193</sup> The same idea appears in Gheorghe I. Brătianu's work.<sup>194</sup> To Stelian Brezeanu, only the eastern part of the Bulgarian state was Vlachia.<sup>195</sup> By contrast, Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca placed it in the northwestern part of present-day Bulgaria that is in the valley of the Timok River. Later, however, he adopted a wider geographic definition of Vlachia, from the Haemus to the north up to the Danube, between Vidin and the Black Sea.<sup>196</sup>

Sergiu Iosipescu pointed out that the rebellion broke out in the vicinity of Anchialos and that the rebels attacked Preslav during their first raid(s). His conclusion was that Vlachia was somewhere in the eastern Stara Planina range, and its northern piedmont, the Ludogorie (Deliorman), "all the way up to the neighboring valley of the Lower Danube."<sup>197</sup> On the basis of Robert de Clari's testimony, István Vásáry placed Vlachia between the Danube and the Haemus.<sup>198</sup> More recently, the Italian historian Francesco Dall'Aglio noted that to Niketas Choniates, Bulgaria was just the part of the former empire that became the Bulgarian theme after 1018. Choniates used the term Vlachs exclusively for the rebels, because the movement started in Moesia, which had a considerable Vlach population.<sup>199</sup>

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191 Geoffroy, c. 491 (ed. Faral, II, 306–307; transl. Fluieraru, 192); Gagova 1986a, 95–96 (who noticed that Cornelius Duplicius de Schepper noted in 1533 that the river Tundža sprang from the mountains of *Valahia: Missions diplomatiques de Corneille Duplicius De Schepper, dit Scepperus, ambassadeur de Christiern II, de Charles V, de Ferdinand Ier et de Marie, reine de Hongrie, gouvernante des Pays-Bas, de 1523 à 1555*, ed. J. L. D. de Saint-Genois, G. A. Yssel de Schepper, Bruxelles, 1856, 189).

192 Brătescu 1919, 22–24.

193 Giurescu 1931, 116–120.

194 Brătianu 1980, 66–67.

195 Brezeanu 1980, 663–666.

196 Tanașoca 1981, 590; Tanașoca 2001, 117–118, 121–122.

197 Iosipescu 1994, 255.

198 Vásáry 2005, 27.

199 Dall'Aglio 2011b, 599; Dall'Aglio 2013, 302–303.

Vlachia, therefore, was a territory between the high- and the lowlands, which had the Stara Planina range to the south. The population of Vlachia thus lived close to the mountains. Because of the Pecheneg and Cuman invasions of the 11th and 12th centuries, the lowlands between the Danube and the Stara Planina (the *Dunavska ravnina*, in Bulgarian) were depopulated.<sup>200</sup> In 1087, when Solomon, formerly king of Hungary, traveled from the south toward the Danube, he is said to have crossed deserted areas (*errantes itaque ferebantur per inania*), before arriving at a deserted fortress (*castrum desertum et vacuum*), which was located somewhere on the bank of the river.<sup>201</sup>

The (counter-)offensive of the rebels was made possible by a number of serious mistakes that Isaac II made in the process. He gave the command of the first expedition to his uncle, the *sebastokrator* John Angelos Dukas. He proved to be a capable general who harassed the enemy daring to enter the plain of Thrace. He was in fact so competent that the emperor became suspicious, lest he would rise in rebellion himself in order to usurp his power. He was replaced by Isaac's brother-in-law, the *caesar* John Cantacuzenus, who himself had "a rich experience in leading military operations, but then, he did not lead well the war against the Vlachs." The Vlachs have learned from the defeat inflicted upon them by John Angelos Dukas and did not engage in any open confrontation in the lowlands of Thrace, but instead withdrew into the mountains. John Cantacuzenus misread their intentions and pursued them into the highlands. At one point, he pitched camp without taking care to fortify it with ditches. He was attacked during the night. The Byzantine soldiers were taken by surprise, and many died or fell into captivity. Even the standards and the *caesar's* clothes were taken, and he barely escaped alive. After that, the rebels occupied again the lowlands south of the Zygus. Where that battle took place, it is not known. After such disgraceful defeat, Alexios Vranas, the winner of Dimitritsi, was appointed commander. He was truly the most competent general at that moment. He immediately took the offensive against the rebels, but advanced carefully into the mountain area, avoiding ambushes.<sup>202</sup>

200 Borisov 2007, 74–78.

201 *Chronici Hungarici*, 410.

202 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 375–377; transl. Magoulias, 207; FHDR III, 260/261); Wolff 1949, 184; Brand 1968, 89, 337; Vlachos 1974, 160; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 112–114; Malingoudis 1978, 77; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 58–59; Stephenson 2000, 291–292; Marinow 2006, 186–187, 191; Ritter 2010, 44–45; Ritter 2013, 184. A lead seal of John Angelos Dukas was found somewhere in the area of Asenovgrad (Jordanov 2015, 234–235).

But Alexios Vranas was an ambitious man, and he apparently tried to take advantage of Isaac II's weakness to take his place, in the process using the army, which had been entrusted to him to fight the Vlachs and the Bulgarians. His usurpation started, as mentioned, in April 1187. This suggests that the three previous campaigns against the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, and the Cumans under the command of John Angelos Dukas, John Cantacuzenus, and Alexios Vranas have to be placed chronologically between the fall of 1186 and March 1187. It has even been suggested that Alexios Vranas wanted to use the attacks of the Vlachs and of the Bulgarians to overthrow the emperor. In any case, he did nothing to stop them.<sup>203</sup>

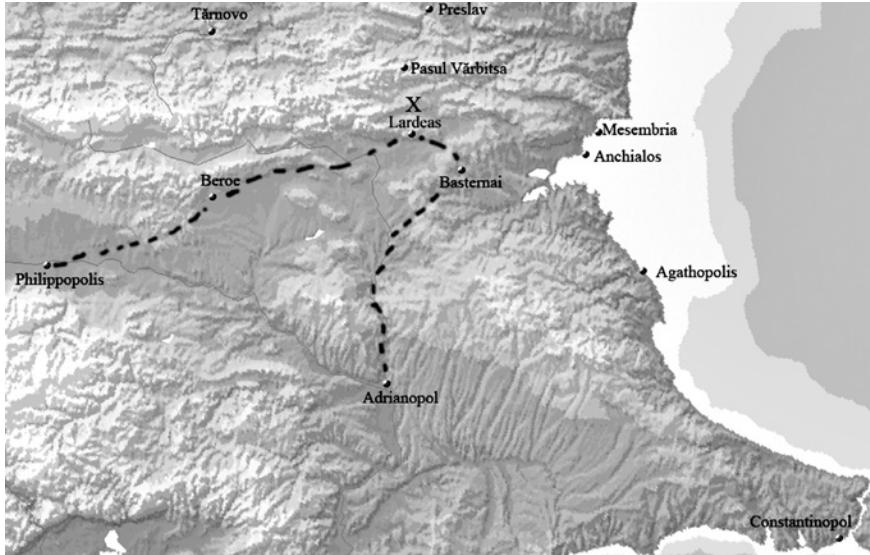
On the other hand, it is possible that Asan contacted a fortress commander in the area temporarily controlled by Alexios Vranas. This may explain the presence at Dobri Dol of a seal with no known analogies. It bears the Greek form of his name (Ἰωάννη βασιλεὺς τῶν Βουλγάρων), and the portrait of Saint Theodore on the obverse. Ivan Jordanov has noted that the saint's portrait resembles that on the seals of the *caesar* John Cantacuzenus. He therefore believed that the seal, which clearly belonged to Asan (also called John), was stamped with a *boulloterion* (the tongs-like instrument employed for the production of seals) captured during the above-mentioned night attack against John Cantacuzenus. At any rate, John to whom the seal belonged cannot be Johannitsa.<sup>204</sup> The seal was attached to a letter, which must have been sent by Asan to the rebel Alexios Vranas. The letter may have contained an offer of alliance against Isaac II, and because of that, John's seal bears an inscription in Greek. The Byzantine fortress of Dobri Dol located in northern Thrace between Philippopolis and Beroe was in the region, which Alexios Vranas controlled at that time (see Map 1).<sup>205</sup>

Asan could not obviously call himself *basileos* of the Vlachs, for the imperial title (tsar) was associated at that moment only with the Bulgarians, the "political nation" of the First Bulgarian Empire. Vlachs were included into the imperial title only by Johannitsa in a context that was very different politically, which both required such a change and prompted the transformation of the state ideology. There are other two seals of Asan with the title of tsar of the Bulgarians, but written in Slavonic, and with the portrait of Saint Demetrios, not Saint

203 Guiland 1964, 127–128.

204 Jordanov 2001a, 92–94 (nr. 151); Jordanov 2001b, 452–458; Jordanov 2006, 182. For the lead seals see also Atanasov 1999, 123–124. An identical seal from Skopje suggests similar relations with the duke of Skopion. Mihajlovski 2016.

205 Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 114.



MAP 1 *The Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 1187.*

Theodore on the obverse. One of them was discovered in Constantinople, which may still indicate a message to Alexios Vranas.<sup>206</sup>

Asan's seals can clarify at least in part Peter and Asan's intitulation during the first years after the rebellion. Peter most likely pretended to be a Byzantine emperor at least from the late 1185. He definitely made such a claim in December 1189, when he mentioned it to Frederick I Barbarossa. Meanwhile, his brother Asan (John) considered himself to be a tsar, but only of the Bulgarians. In other words, Asan's claim was more realistic and adequate. George Akropolites knew that Asan had reigned for nine years before being killed by Ivanko in 1196.<sup>207</sup> He may have thus started his reign in 1187, which strongly suggests that he assumed at that time the title of tsar of the Bulgarians, as indicated by the Dobri Dol seal.

After Alexios Vranas was defeated under the walls of Constantinople (he besieged the city between July and early September of 1187), Isaac II turned again against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, most likely in early October 1187. They had in the meantime continued to plunder Thrace, together with their Cuman allies, and reached as far as Agathopolis (present-day Akhtopol) on the Black Sea coast, i.e., about 150 km away from Constantinople. The emperor

206 Atanasov 1999, 127; Jordanov 2001a, 99 (nr. 152, 153).

207 Akropolites, c. 12 (ed. Heisenberg, 20; transl. Macrides, 137; FHDR III, 398/399).

camped at Allage, on the banks of the river Taurokomos, somewhere near Adrianople, and from where he went north at the head of a unit of 2,000 elite warriors. His objective was to regain control over the mountain passes.<sup>208</sup> On October 7, he stopped at Basternai (probably Ekzarkh Antimovo, 14 km south of Karnobat<sup>209</sup>). On the second day, 20 to 25 km after beginning to march to the west in the direction of Beroe (Stara Zagora), he received news that the Vlachs and the Bulgarians had turned north. Isaac II decided to pursue some 6,000 Cumans carrying the booty and 12,000 captives. The *sebastos* Andronikos Cantacuzenus was sent to guard the region around Anchialos (one of the centers of the revolt). The troops commanded by the emperor were then attacked several times by the Cuman horsemen. Choniates describes the encounter:

Approaching, they threw arrows and fell over each other hurtling with the javelins, but after a while they turned their assault into a run and challenged the adversaries to chase them from the back like some fugitives; and, turning again, quicker than birds cutting the air, they fought with the enemies, skirmished harder than before. And after having done that several times, as they gained advantage over the Romei, they ceased their turns and drew their swords giving vent to a terrible cry; they darted, almost quicker than thinking, on the Romei. And they cut down alike the one reached from behind, as well as the one who fought or the one who ran inflamed with fear.<sup>210</sup>

The tactic described here—the feigned retreat stratagem—is also documented for other nomads, primarily Magyars and Mongols. It was particularly efficient against an army made up of heavy cavalry and infantry.

On October 11, 1187, the elite troops under the emperor's command caught up with the Cumans and took by surprise their camp at Lardeas (most likely present-day Lozenets), to the northeast from Diampolis (Iambol).<sup>211</sup> However,

208 Lazăr 2010, 12.

209 Soustal 1991, 193.

210 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, B (ed. Van Dieten, 9–10; FHDR III, 340/341–342/343); Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 394–397; transl. Magoulias, 217–218; FHDR III, 262/263–264/265); Zlatarski 1972, II, 458–463; Bachmann 1935, 78–85; Brand 1968, 91; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 115–119; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 61–62; Malingoudis 1978, 78; Gagova 1986b, 196; Soustal 1991, 176, 204; Marinow 2006, 188; Ritter 2010, 51–52; Ritter 2013, 187; Iosipescu 2013b, 21.

211 Gjuzelev 1986, 209; Soustal 1991, 333; Ritter 2010, 52.

they were themselves attacked by another group of some 1,000 Cumans. Clearly outnumbered, the Byzantines nonetheless won after intimidating their adversaries:

Because of the shouts and of their unexpected assault, the army of my Lordship was troubled and was filled with fear and started running. And the others followed them strongly, running, uncovering their swords and reining in their horses, knocked down those who got near. And things would have turned then to the worst and we would have paid for everything we did, should my Lordship failed to order to the few people who still followed me, to unleash a stronger shout all together and, with an assault on them and with the noise of the shields we petrified the barbarians and thus put a good end to that episode. Because, according to the imperial flags, which are shaped like dragons, the Scythians realized that my Lordship is nearby and, not being capable to halt the assault against them, they retreated running in disorder, scattered asunder and becoming an easy to catch prey for our good horse riders. Then, one hurt many and two followed more than ten. And if the night had not come to set them free, there would not have been one left to deliver the news of the misfortune.

In his *History*, Niketas Choniates has a more dramatic description of the events: “The blare and blast of the bronze-mouthed trumpets, together with the display of representations of dragons (δραχόν) suspended on poles and blowing in the wind, terrified the enemy because they gave the impression of a much larger army.”<sup>212</sup> This is in fact the latest attestation of the *draco*, the standard of the Roman army adopted from the Dacians—a snake (instead of a wolf head) stuck on a pole.<sup>213</sup>

Despite the victory at Lardeas, Emperor Isaac stopped the counteroffensive and withdrew to Beroe. From Lardeas he could have advanced to Preslav through the Vărbitsa pass (at 880 m above sea level). This may in fact have been the initial goal of the campaign. The Byzantine army continued to harass Beroe and Agathopolis, while another group led by Asan plundered the environs of Philippopolis. Niketas Choniates noted with some admiration: Asan “was especially shrewd and extremely competent in devising ways out of desperate straits.”

212 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, B (ed. Van Dieten, 11; FHDR III, 344/345); Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 397; transl. Magoulias, 218; FHDR III, 264/265).

213 Madgearu 2012, 106.

In Thrace, the situation was out of control and that may be the reason for which the Byzantine army was ultimately defeated in the fall of 1187, despite its victory at Lardeas. The imperial propaganda, however, presented the campaign as a major success. In an oration he delivered on January 6, 1190, Niketas Choniates describes the emperor defeating all the enemies, among which he counted Scythians and Bordons, “a Tauroscythian people which does not fear death; they rose together with the barbarians of Haemus, but were crushed.”<sup>214</sup> The oration may not refer, however, but to the campaign of 1187. The “Scythians” are of course the Cumans, and the Tauroscythians are the Rus’. But who are the Bordons? Among Romanian historians, Dimitre Onciul and Gheorghe Popa-Lisseanu first linked the Bordons to the Brodniks, a population mentioned in the 12th and 13th centuries in Moldavia, as well as in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.<sup>215</sup> As an in-depth analysis of the origin of the Brodniks and of their name is beyond the scope of this book, I will rely here on the latest historical and linguistic contributions to this problem. Victor Spinei believes that the Brodniks were a Turkic population related to the Cumans. Their Slavic name derives from *broditi* (“to pass through the water or the swamp”), not from *brod* (“ford”), as often surmised.<sup>216</sup>

Soon after returning to Constantinople, Emperor Isaac II decided to start a new campaign this time directed at the very center of rebel power. The Byzantine troops set camp at Philippopolis, and from there they began moving towards Triaditsa (Sofia). The goal seems to have been a strategic maneuver: “as he [Isaac] heard that from there the road to the Haemus is not difficult, but even through some places straight ways opened and there was plenty of water and hay for the cattle along the road, if someone was to go there at the right time.” However it was too late in the year, and the army spent a harsh winter in Sofia, whilst the emperor returned to Constantinople in December 1187 or January 1188. In the spring of 1188, he resumed operations and attempted to take the Lovitzon (Loveč), a stronghold located north of Stara Planina, 75 km west of Tărnovo. After three months, however, the siege was abandoned. The

214 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, Θ (ed. Van Dieten, 93); Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 101; Achim 2008, 70; Spinei 2009, 141. For the date of the speech see Van Dieten 1971, 116–120.

215 Onciul 1968, I, 602, 612; II, 50; Gh. Popa-Lisseanu, *Brodnicii (Izvoarele Istoriei Românilor)*, vol. XII), București, 1938, 6, 19, 41, 64. The speech survived in a manuscript from Biblioteca Marciana (Venice), and it was analyzed for the first time by Uspenskij 1879. His work, known by Popa-Lisseanu, was later on quoted by Diaconu 1978, 115 and Iosipescu 1994, 257, 259, but they erroneously sustained that the fragment belongs to a “variant kept in Venice of the text of Niketas Choniates”, believing that the text was the *History* of the same author.

216 Spinei 2006, 434–435; Spinei 2009, 159–161; Moldovanu 2009, 335–338.



Byzantines may have reached Loveč by crossing the mountains through the Troyan Pass. Their goal appears to have been to approach Tărnovo on the left flank, possibly cutting off the communication lines with the Cumans north of the Danube.<sup>217</sup> The failure to take Loveč made such plans wishful thinking. The rebels were sufficiently well trained to resist a siege, and Tărnovo was already the center of an area where there was no Byzantine authority anymore. Nonetheless, under unknown circumstances, Asan's wife, Helen, and his younger brother Johannitsa, were captured in the spring of 1188. There are no details in Niketas Choniates about the place and manner in which the two were captured, but he mentions that Johannitsa subsequently spent a few years in Constantinople as hostage. Helen was apparently released shortly after her capture. Taking hostages from the leading families of enemy states was a common practice in Byzantium. The goal was not only to deter attacks, but also to turn the hostages into loyal supporters of the court of Constantinople and to make them assimilate the Byzantine culture. This was certainly the case of Johannitsa, and the expectation was probably that he would guarantee the peace concluded between his brothers Peter and Asan and Emperor Isaac II.<sup>218</sup>

In his account of the march to Sofia, Niketas Choniates claims that the emperor suddenly decided “to enter once again in Zagora.” This suggests that he had done it before, most likely in the spring of 1186 or in the fall of 1187. In a manuscript variant, the name *Zagora* applies in fact to the former campaign, instead of Mysia rendered by most other manuscripts. Apparently there was some overlap between Zagora and Moesia, the territory to the north from Stara Planina.<sup>219</sup> Zagora appears in Niketas Choniates' works in three other instances. From the first, one can draw the conclusion that Zagora was the area north of the mountains where Tărnovo was located, while from the second (based on an interpolation) that the “the border of Mysia” coincided with the “mountains of Zagora.” Finally, in the third instance Johannitsa is described as “the lord of Zagora.”<sup>220</sup>

217 Iosipescu 1984, 298.

218 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, II; *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 398–399, 472; transl. Magoulias, 218–219, 259; FHDR III, 264/265–266/267, 286/287); Zlatarski 1972, II, 465–470; Wolff 1949, 184; Brand 1968, 91–92; Primov 1971, 20; Vlachos 1974, 162; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 118–119; Malingoudis 1978, 79; Angelov 1984, 51; Božilov 1985, 30, 43; Gagova 1986b, 196; Dančeva-Vasileva 2004, 38–39; Vásáry 2005, 44; Murešan 2009, 148; Ritter 2010, 52–53, 56; Ritter 2013, 189–191. For the name of his wife, see Pavlov 2015, 358.

219 The same interpretation at Brătescu 1919, 27; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 56; Curta 2006, 362.

220 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, I; *Alexios Angelos*, I, III (ed. Van Dieten, 373, 468, 471, 512; transl. Magoulias, 282; FHDR III, 258/259, 282/283, 286/287, 302/303).

It is important to note in this respect that in older Byzantine sources, the Bulgarian place name *Zagora*, which means “beyond the mountain(s),” referred to the region south of the Haemus. The name first applied to the region between the Haemus and Develtos (Debelt, near Burgas), which Emperor Justinian II gave to Tervel in 705. That region was taken back in 756, but the peace treaty of 864 gave Zagora to Bulgaria from the Sidera (Riš) Pass to Develtos. The region seems to have been a deserted area, a buffer zone and a “no man’s land.”<sup>221</sup> Choniates seems, therefore to have seen Zagora from the northern, i.e., Bulgarian perspective. “Beyond the mountains” from that perspective meant the territory to north from the mountains, that is Moesia also known as Vlachia. That location is confirmed by Pseudo-Kodinos, according to whom the revolt of the Vlachs and Bulgarians broke out in *Zagoria*.<sup>222</sup> In his letters of 1202 and 1203, the title of Basil, the primate of Johannitsa’s Latin Church, was archbishop or *pastor de Zagora*. In later letters written in 1204 and 1205, he is more specifically entitled “archbishop of Tărnovo (*archiepiscopum Trinovitenum*).”<sup>223</sup> The title of archbishop of Zagora reappears in the letters of Demetrios Chomatenos, the Byzantine archbishop of Ohrid, for the years 1216, 1219 and 1228.<sup>224</sup>

The best proof that the 13th-century Zagora was a region located north of the Stara Planina, comes from John Asan II’s charter of ca. 1230 granting trade privileges to Ragusan merchants (see chapter 8). In that charter, *Zagorie* is that part of Bulgaria which included Tărnovo. Similarly, the 13th-century version of the Life of Saint Ivan of Rila places Tărnovo in *Zagorie*.<sup>225</sup> The region north of the Stara Planina also appears as *Zagora* in the 14th-century notarial documents from Genoa. The Venetians called John Asan II *imperator del Zagora* or *Imperator Exagorarum*. In 1381, the treaty of Turin between Genoa and Venice mentioned *partes de Zagora, subditas Dobrotice*, as the region ruled by Dobrotich. The evidence is uncontrovertible: while Byzantine sources of the 8th to 10th centuries applied the name to the lands south of the Stara Planina

221 Koledarov 1973, 94–99; Gagova 1986a, 90; Soustal 1991, 503.

222 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, I, 148; III, 45 (FHDR IV, 88/89); Koledarov 1973, 103; Gjuzelev 1986, 210; Brezeanu 1989a, 67; Ritter 2013, 162.

223 PL, vol. 214, 1115–1116 (n. CXVII, CXIX); vol. 215, 156 (n. CXLIII); 280 (n. II), 282 (n. III), 288 (n. V), 294 (n. IX, X), 295 (n. XI), 706 (n. CXXIX) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 5 (doc. IV), 6 (doc. V), 11 (doc. XI), 19, 20, 22, 26, 27 (doc. XV–XIX), 32–35 (doc. XXII–XXIV, XXVI), 54 (doc. XXXVIII) = FLHB III, 314, 315, 320, 323, 326, 327, 329, 335, 340, 342–344; Koledarov 1973, 100.

224 Demetrios Chomatenos, 70\*, 230\*, 261\*, 47 (nr. 8), 378 (nr. 114), 423 (no. 146); Gjuzelev 1977a, 45.

225 Koledarov 1973, 101; Biliarsky 1999, 194; Petkov 2008, 264, 482.

mountains, during the 13th and 14th centuries *Zagora* was the name of the region north of the mountains. As a matter of fact, that was not the only *Zagora* in the Balkans. Several other regions inhabited by Slavs in Pindos and in Dalmatia were also called *Zagora*, and in the 14th century the name sometimes applied to the whole of Bulgaria.<sup>226</sup>

After failing to take Lovitzon (Loveč), Isaac II's troops withdrew. Although Niketas Choniates makes no mention of it, it was likely that a peace treaty was concluded in the summer of 1188, which recognized the independence of the territory north of the Stara Planina, as well as the area between those mountains and the line north of Beroe—Philipopolis—Agathopolis.<sup>227</sup> Through this peace, a new state was established, which although reconnecting ideologically with early medieval Bulgaria, in fact came into being with a significant contribution of both Vlachs and Cumans. As Alexander Vasiliev long noted, this was a Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman state with a dynasty of Vlach origin.<sup>228</sup>

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226 Jireček 1876, 375; Iroaie 1967, 101–103; Koledarov 1973, 99–104; Iscirkov 1984; Gagova 1986a, 91; Soustal 1991, 51.

227 *Regesten*, II, 94 (nr. 1580); Zlatarski 1972, II, 470–472; Primov 1971, 20; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 340; Vlachs 1974, 162; Cankova-Petkova 1978a, 119; Koledarov 1979, 38; Cankova-Petkova 1980, 63; Angelov 1984, 51; Gagova 1986b, 196; Fine 1994, 15; Stephenson 2000, 293; Lazăr 2010, 13; Lazăr 2011, 165.

228 Vasiliev 1958, 442. The phrase was appears in Papacostea 1993, 18.

## Peter and Asan, 1189–1197

The rise of the state founded by Peter and Asan was fostered by a favorable international context, in which the power of the Byzantine Empire was rapidly declining, while that of Hungary was increasingly growing in the northern Balkans, particularly in the area inhabited by the Serbs. After the attack of the Kingdom of Sicily was repelled, the next political-military situation affecting the Balkan Peninsula was the Third Crusade. That expedition was caused by Saladin's conquest, on October 2, 1187, of Jerusalem, the city that had previously fallen into the hands of the participants in the First Crusade.

The news of the Muslim conquest of the Holy City triggered a shockwave throughout Western Christianity. Preparations for a new crusade against Saladin began immediately. The most important European rulers answered Pope Gregory VIII's call, and in the course of year 1188, gathered and prepared their armies. Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa was the first to depart for the Holy Land (May 11, 1189) at the head of a large army of 100,000 men. The army followed the traditional routes across the Balkan territories of the Byzantine Empire. However, fearing disturbances, Emperor Isaac II did not consent to the crossing of the crusaders through the empire. As a matter of fact, just one month after Frederick I Barbarossa and his army began their march, Isaac II renewed the alliance that his predecessor (and enemy), Andronikos, had concluded with Saladin. This was most likely in response to Frederick's alliance with the Seljuk Turks, Saladin's enemies.

The Byzantine emperor tried everything in his power to block the passing of the crusaders, but eventually, in November 1189, allowed them to cross the Dardanelles Straits, after Frederick and his army had waited for three months in Adrianople. Isaac was afraid that Frederick intended to occupy Constantinople and place his son, Frederick VI of Swabia on the Byzantine throne. The devastation caused by the crusaders in Thrace and Macedonia convinced Emperor Isaac that he could only expect worst from Frederick. The mutual suspicion was of course based on a much older and increasing attitude of distrust and even hatred between West Europeans and Byzantines. Such an attitude became obvious as the crusading army approached Constantinople.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For the start of the Crusade of Frederick I see: Johnson 1969, 87–94; Primov 1975, 44–46; Cankova-Petkova 1982, 69–70; Gjuzelev 1987, 113–114; Iosipescu 1994, 263–264; Tyerman 2006,

Peter and Asan took advantage of the growing hostility between Frederick I and Isaac II. The leader of the Vlach-Bulgarian state that had just become independent had all the reasons to continue the war against Byzantium, but now had an opportunity to expand territorially by exploiting the difficult situation created by the approaching army of the crusaders. The Serbian ruler followed the same policy, and entered into an alliance with the Asanids. The peace treaty concluded with Isaac II in the summer of 1188 could thus be declared void, even though Johannitsa was still a hostage in Constantinople. Through its involvement in the conflict between the two emperors and through its increasingly aggressive military actions, by asserting more offensive military actions, the Vlach-Bulgarian state entered a new stage of development.<sup>2</sup>

The German army reached Belgrade by late June, and Braničevo on July 2, 1189. The commander of the latter stronghold was a duke (*dux de Brandicz*). At the emperor's orders, the duke deliberately misguided the crusading army by directing it onto difficult roads. Once in a large and thick forest (*silva longissima Bulgarie*), the crusaders were continually harassed by Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Serbians. Those were most likely no mere thieves. In fact, some of them, upon being captured, declared that they had received their orders from the Byzantine duke of Braničevo. Frederick I sent envoys to Isaac II asking for explanations, but the latter received them tardily late and then took the envoys hostage:

The Greeklings, Bulgarians, Serbians and the semi-barbarous Vlachs lay in ambush, springing forth from their secret lairs to wound those who were last into camp and the servants who went out to collect edible plants or fodder for the horses with poisoned arrows. A few of these were captured, and they then confessed that they had been forced to do these things on the order of their lord the Duke of Braničevo, and above all on the instructions of the Emperor of the Greeks.<sup>3</sup>

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417–421; Magdalino 2008, 649–650. For the discussions around the alliance with Saladin: Simpson 2015, 15–18.

2 Gjuzelev 1987, 112.

3 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 27–28 (transl. Loud, 60; FLHB III, 253): “Greculos, Bulgares, Seruigios et Flachos semibarbaros in insidiis ponentes, ut ex abditis repentinis incursibus extremos in castris, sed et servientes in gramine seu pabulo equorum colligendo progredientes sagittis toxicatis ferirent. Quorum plures, dum comprehenderentur, confessi sunt iussu domni sui ducis de Brandiez et principaliter imperatoris Grecorum edicto *ad hec se perpetranda coactos*”. See also Sicardus, 169 (summarized by Albertus Miliol, 647): “Erat autem ibi nemus itineris quatuor dierum, cuius viam artissimam preses Burgarie dissipavit, et in exitu nemoris munitionem faciens preparavit se cum exercitibus cesarem impugnare. Sed nemore magno cum labore et difficultate pertransito dux Suevorum, qui exercitu precedebat, munitionem

That the crusaders were ambushed by Greeks, Vlachs and Bulgarians acting at the emperor's order for the duke of Braničevo results also from the *Historia peregrinorum*.<sup>4</sup> Both sources make it clear that area to the south from Braničevo was under imperial authority, at a time when the Vlach-Bulgarian state had come into existence in Tărnovo. The "semi-barbarous Vlachs" who attacked the crusaders were most likely not part of that state, since they inhabited a region that had been for a short while under Isaac II's rule. In other words, not all the Vlachs had rebelled against Byzantium. In the summer of 1189, those ones who lived to the south and to the west from the Stara Planina were outside the region separated from the empire because of the rebellion in Tărnovo. They were therefore on the emperor's side. A few months later, Frederick's army was in Adrianople (see below). On February 2, 1190, near Arkadiopolis (Lüleburgaz), the crusaders were confronted with Isaac II's Vlach and Cuman soldiers:

The following day our men attacked the squadrons of the mercenary army of the Emperor of Constantinople, composed of Vlachs and Cumans. They fought with them and unexpectedly put them to flight, despite the absence of the duke. A few of our men, but a great many of the enemy, were taken prisoners; barely fifteen of our sergeants were killed.<sup>5</sup>

Historians have often ignored this testimony. Nonetheless, it clearly shows that many Vlachs continued to serve in the Byzantine army. Ever since the 10th century Vlachs were recruited from Thessaly,<sup>6</sup> and it is possible that the Vlachs of 1189 came from that same region. Shortly before their encounter with the Vlachs and the Cumans, the crusaders had in fact attacked and plundered Vlachia in Thessaly order to plunder it.<sup>7</sup> The Byzantines had recruited

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destruxit et magnam illorum multitudinem interfecit." See Guiland 1964, 132; Johnson 1969, 98; Primov 1975, 46–47; Decei 1978, 93–94; Fine 1994, 24; Iosipescu 1994, 265; Gagova 1998, 121; Stephenson 2000, 294–295; Curta 2006, 371; Oppl 2011, 293–295; Iosipescu 2013b, 23.

4 *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 132 (FLHB III, 224).

5 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 63 (transl. Loud, 89; FLHB III, 283–284): "Sequenti die impeggerant nostri in phalanges conductitii exercitus Constantinopolitani imperatoris Blacorum et Cumanorum, cum quibus congressi duce absente in fugam eos inopinatam converterunt, paucis quidem e nostris, pluribus vero hostium captivatis et vix quindecim nostrorum servientium occisis." See Iorga 1937, 107; Johnson 1969, 105; Iosipescu 1994, 268; Spinei 2006, 407; Külzer 2008, 265; Oppl 2011, 314.

6 Stănescu 1989, 26–28.

7 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 56 (transl. Loud, 83; FLHB III, 277): "imperterritus invasit regionem opulentam Flachiam dictam, non multum a Thessalonica distantem, in qua rebelles aliquot occidit abundantiamque necessariorum plus quam revehere sui potuissent, invenit"

Vlachs on several occasions in the recent past. For example, because of the lack of a sufficient number of soldiers for an expedition to Hungary, the general Leo Vatatzes enlisted in 1167 a multitude of Vlachs, who probably came from Dobrudja. They were clearly not part of an organized group.<sup>8</sup> Cumans are also attested as mercenaries in the Byzantine army, and it is not at all surprising to see some of them serving the Byzantines in 1189, while others attacked the empire.

There is indirect proof for the late survival of the Byzantine administration in at least a part of the theme of Bulgaria, the center of which was in Niš after its reorganization in the late 11th century.<sup>9</sup> While in Adrianople, the crusaders escaped the thieves of a *juppanus vel satrapus Bulgariae*, who had been captured somewhere in Bulgaria.<sup>10</sup> Ansbertus employed here a term, *župan*, which he (or his informant) must have learned from the Serbs, since the title was no longer in use among Bulgarians.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the term “satrap” was borrowed from the political vocabulary of the educated Byzantines. Some have wrongly concluded that the “satrap” in question was a Vlach rebel from Macedonia named Dobromir Chrysos, but Petăr Mutafčiev rightly rejected this idea.<sup>12</sup> The term “satrap” is of Persian origin, but Byzantine authors employed it, sometimes ironically, in reference to governors of newly-conquered provinces. Both Basil Monachos the duke of Bulgaria (1053) and Nestor, the duke of Paradunavon (1072) are mentioned as “satraps.”<sup>13</sup> It is therefore likely that Ansbertus' *juppanus vel satrapus Bulgariae* was the last duke (of the theme) of Bulgaria.

When the crusaders reached Niš on July 27, 1189, Emperor Frederick I met with the great *župan* of Serbia, Stephen Nemanja. Nemanja must have (re)occupied the town shortly after Béla III had returned it to Isaac II, perhaps just before the arrival of the crusaders (quite possibly taking advantage for the

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(“undaunted, invaded a wealthy region called Vlachia, which is not far from Thessalonica, in which he killed a number of rebels and found such an abundance of supplies that they were unable to carry all of them off”); Johnson 1969, 106.

8 Năsturel 1979, 102–105.

9 Madgearu 2013a, 99–100.

10 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 56 (transl. Loud, 83; FLHB III, 277); Gjuzelev 1987, 225.

11 Biliarsky 2011, 369 has demonstrated that *župan* was no more a dignity in the Second Bulgarian Empire.

12 Zlatarski 1972, III, 17–21; A. Kazhdan, C. Brand, *Dobromir Chrysos*, in ODB, I, 641. However, Biliarsky 2011, 370 has admitted that the satrap could be a ruler from Macedonia, while Gagova 2011, 215 supported the identification with that “Bulgarian” ruler from Serres, namely Dobromir Chrysos.

13 Oikonomides 1972, 333.

engagement of the Byzantine army, in the spring and summer of 1188, against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians). Judging from the sources, Nemanja made Niš one of his residences.<sup>14</sup> His control of the town and the surrounding countryside is confirmed by the *Historia peregrinorum*, and mentioned in Nemanja's biography written by his son Stephen.<sup>15</sup> However, according to Ansbertus, Niš was under Byzantine rule, since it is was there that Isaac II's envoy reached Frederick I, before the emperor's meeting with Stephen Nemanja. The latter was not in town at that time, but arrived later from somewhere else. This suggests that in 1189, the town was in a no man's land between the Byzantine Empire and Serbia.

The great župan Stephen Nemanja offered to become the emperor's vassal, in exchange for the emperor's recognizing as Serbian those territories that the Serbs had taken from the Byzantines, namely the theme of Bulgaria, which included also the town of Niš. Frederick I, however, cautiously avoided the escalation of the conflict with Isaac II, given that Alexios, the emperor's brother, had just arrived in Niš. Alexios informed Frederick I that Isaac II did not approve the conduct of the duke of Braničevo, who had acted out of his own initiative. Through Alexios, Isaac promised that the crusaders would be given supplies, if keeping the peace. Having already concluded an alliance with Stephen Nemanja, Peter, the leader of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, also sent an envoy to Niš. Unlike Nemanja, who simply wanted Frederick I to recognize the *statu quo*, Peter proposed a joint campaign against Isaac II:

During this disturbance in the Greek kingdom, and at the time when the army of the Cross was traversing Bulgaria, the aforesaid counts of Serbia and Rashka took the opportunity to make part of Bulgaria subject to their rule, and they concluded an agreement with Kalopeter against the Emperor of Constantinople. Kalopeter indeed greeted the lord emperor courteously, both by letter and through messengers, offering his majesty due respect and a promise of faithful assistance against his enemies.

However, according to *Historia peregrinorum*, Nemanja also offered military support (*auxilium*) not only in his name, but in that of (Kalo)Peter and

14 Laurent 1941, 120–121; Primov 1975, 48; Opll 1986, 86; Fine 1994, 7, 15, 24; Ritter 2010, 89; Opll 2011, 295–296.

15 *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 134–135 (FLHB III, 227): “Nisse civitati, quam cum tota adiacente provincia de Constantinopolitano preceptam imperio Neaman et Chrazimerus (Strazimir), magni comites de Seruigia et Rassaia, cum tercio fratre Merzillao (Miroslav) nuper in suam redegerant potestatem”; Stephen Nemanja, 87.



of Asan, who “by warrior virtue obtained the reign over a part of Bulgaria on the Danube side as well as over some parts of Thracia” (*partem Bulgariae circa Danubium et partes Thracie sibi subiugatam virtute bellica optinebant*). The great župan regarded the Vlach brothers as *coniurati et amici*.<sup>16</sup>

A participant in the Third Crusade must have been the informant consulted by the English canon lawyer Gervase of Tilbury, who knew that the “land of the Vlach” (*terra Blacti, or Blacki*) was between Braničevo and Niš, in *desertum Bulgariae. Terra Blacti* must have been Peter’s state, with which the crusaders had just come in contact.<sup>17</sup>

Both Stephen Nemanja and Peter wanted to become Frederick I’s vassals, in order to participate in a common war against Isaac II. But the German emperor rejected the offers, as he had engaged in order to free Jerusalem, and not to fight Christians. The crusading army continued its march and reached Sofia on August, 13. The city had been previously plundered by the Serbs, and the promised markets had been disbanded. Moreover, Isaac II ordered the roads to be blocked with collapsed trees, and several fortifications in the valley of Maritsa to be quickly restored. Moreover, the Greeks and the Vlachs (*hostibus Grecis et Flachis*) continued to harass the crusaders on the difficult road from Niš to Sofia, no doubt acting at the orders of the duke of Braničevo. They emerged from the woods on both sides of the road to shoot poisoned arrows. Those who were caught were hanged. According to Tageno, at the second pass after

16 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 33; see also 29–30, 46 (transl. Loud, 61, 64, 75; FLHB III, 254, 257, 269): “In ea fluctuatione regni Grecie prefati comites de Saruigia et Crazzia eo tempore, quo exercitus crucis Bulgariam transmeabat, occasione accepta partem Bulgariae sue ditioni subiugaverant, federe inito cum Kalopetro adversus imperatorem Constantinopolitanum. Qui scilicet Kalopetrus domnum imperatorem scriptis et nuntiis officiose salutans debita reverentia et fidelis auxilii contra hostes sponsione maiestati eius inclinabat.” See also *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 135 (FLHB III, 227); *Regesten*, II, 96 (nr. 1594); Zlatarski 1972, II, 471; III, 10–11; Guiland 1964, 132; Johnson 1969, 99; Primov 1975, 48; Cankova-Petkova 1982, 70; Gjuzelev 1987, 113; Iosipescu 1994, 265–266; Stephenson 2000, 295; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2003, 123–124; Maksimović 2005, 271; Ritter 2010, 90; Oppl 2011, 296; Ritter 2013, 192; Iosipescu 2013b, 24.

17 Gervasius, 371: “divisionem capiens apud Brandiz super Danubium. Illic versus septentrionem sunt Cumani, adorantes quidquid illis primo mane occurrit. Illic Gete et Coralli. A divisione Danubii usque Constantinopolim sunt 24 diete versus eorum. Primo enim occurrit desertum Bulgariae, quod est terra Blacti, ubi vicus Ravana et vicus Nifa. In fine deserti est civitas Stralis, caput Romanie. Exhinc Philippopolis; post quam Andrinopolis; exinde Constantinopolis”; Cihodaru 1977, 76; Brezeanu 1980, 664–665; Brezeanu 1981, 596–599.

leaving Niš (most likely Pirot), the road was blocked with with rocks and a timber barrier. There, a real battle took place on August 4.<sup>18</sup>

Additional information about these attacks may be found in the narrative of the Third Crusade written in 1222 by a canon of Holy Trinity in London, named Richard. His source of information was a Templar chaplain who took part in the crusade:

Having crossed the Danube, the emperor arrived at the farther mountain passes of Bulgaria. Huns and Alans, Bulgarians and Patzinaks rushed suddenly out from ambushes on to the Lord's people. These people have become confident bandits because of the inaccessibility and difficult terrain of their regions. The emperor left Bulgaria and entered Macedonia. The land is fortified on all sides with high crags, obstructed with thorn bushes, entangled in narrow winding paths, and in addition the natural fortifications have been improved by man-made constructions. The aforementioned peoples had seized these narrow passes. The villainous emperor Isaac of Constantinople had sent them in advance to do this, so that they could either crush or impede the advancing army. However, our knights successfully overcame both the problem of the enemy and of the road. So having crossed the Macedonian plains, they reached Philippopolis.<sup>19</sup>

This passage has rarely, if ever been discussed by historians. However, it shows clearly that some Bulgarians were fighting in the Byzantine army, along with

18 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 35 (transl. Loud, 65–66; FLHB III, 259); *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 136–138 (FLHB III, 228–230); Tageno, 509 (transl. Loud, 151); Zlatarski 1972, III, 14–15; Johnson 1969, 100–101; Primov 1975, 49; Gjuzelev 1987, 118; Stephenson 2000, 297.

19 *Itinerarium peregrinorum*, I, 21 (ed. Stubbs, 45; transl. Nicholson, 56; FLHB III, 303–304): “Danubio transito cum ad ulteriores Bulgariae fauces deventum esset, Hunni et Alani, Bulgares et Pincenates in populum Domini subito ex insidiis irruunt; quos ad facinus inaccessibleis locorum asperitas fidentius incitabat. Egressus ille a Bulgaria in Macedoniam, eminentibus hinc inde armatur scopulis, dumosis obstruitur sentibus, angustis et anfractuosis semitis implicatur; sed et quibusdam artificiiis, nativa munitio major consurgit. Has locorum angustias praememoratae gentes occupaverant, quas nequissimus Constantinopolitanus imperator Isaakius ad hoc praemiserat, ut venturum exercitum vel opprimerent vel impedirent. Utamque tamen, et hostium et viarum molestiam milites nostri potenter exsuperant; sicque transcursis Macedonum campis, Philippopolim perveniunt.” See also Spinei 2006, 213–214; Opll 2011, 297.

Cuman mercenaries (“Huns”), Pechenegs<sup>20</sup> and Alans,<sup>21</sup> in Macedonia and southern Thrace. Neither one of the two regions had been affected by the rebellion of Peter and Asan. It is important to note that the Byzantine strategy was still based on the idea of blocking roads and passes with felled trees and rocks. The passes under discussion were most likely in the western part of the Stara Planina and in the Rhodopi Mountains. Ansbertus mentions *clausura sancti Basilii*, which has been convincingly identified as the Trayanova vrata. In that pass, the defense relied on wooden towers, which the crusaders set on fire on August 20.<sup>22</sup> All those accounts were colored by Western attitudes towards forests and forest people. The former were liminal, frightening spaces, while the latter were closer to animals than to humans. That Greeks and Vlachs attacked from the woods with poisoned arrows, instead of engaging in battle in the open, simply confirmed deep-seated stereotypes about the forest people.<sup>23</sup>

The skirmishes taking place on the road from Braničevo to Philippopolis may well have been those mentioned in a document that Alexandru Simon has recently brought to scholarly attention—Béla III’s donation charter for a count of German origin, named Narad. Although the original charter is now lost, a copy survives from 1417. Narad was rewarded for his service, especially for having fought *contra furorem Bulgarorum et Rumeorum*. In medieval Latin *furor* was commonly understood as “heresy,” but in this case the word simply meant “fury.” The charter’s editors, Imre Nagy and Imre Szentpétery, believed it to be authentic. Nagy even thought that *Rumeorum* was the erroneous transcription of *Rumenorum*, “of the Romanians.”<sup>24</sup> If so, this may well be the first attestation of the name the Vlachs gave to themselves. Szentpétery, however, believed that *Rumeorum* was simply the corrupted form of *Ruthenorum*. Alexandru Simon claimed that the people in question were the Vlachs, and that the action to which the charter refers must have taken place either during the Third Crusade, or somewhat later, in 1194. The latter date refers to Béla III’s expedition against Bulgaria, when the Hungarian king was allied with Isaac II (see below).<sup>25</sup> However, that expedition (planned for the summer of 1195,

20 This is in fact the last mention of Pechenegs in Byzantine military service.

21 Alans from Ossetia (Caucasus region) were recruited in the 12th and 13rd centuries as mercenaries in the Byzantine army (Krāstev 1997, 126).

22 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 37 (transl. Loud, 67–68; FLHB III, 261); Soustal 1991, 190; Obreshkov 2001, 115; Opll 2011, 298.

23 Dall’Aglia 2010, 410–417.

24 Petrov 1957, 88–89 and Dimitrov 1998, 112–113 admitted this interpretation, considering that the document concerns the campaign of Béla III against Serbia dated to 1192–1193 (see below).

25 Simon 2013. The interpretation was accepted by Pop 2014, 76.

not 1194), never happened. A later date for the events in Narad's charter must therefore be excluded.

An attestation of the word *Romanian*, when all other sources use terms derived from "Vlach," is quite surprising. Simon rightly excluded the possibility that *Rumeorum* referred to *Romei*, because Béla III did not go to war against the Byzantines. However, he neglected the presence among the crusaders attacked on the road from Braničevo to Philippopolis of an army sent by the king of Hungary. That may well explain the use of the word *furor*, and, as a consequence, one cannot exclude the possibility that *Rumeorum* refers to the Byzantines. To be sure, the name *Romei* appears in several other sources in Latin, always in reference to the Byzantines, e.g., the Latin version of the second privilege granted by Isaac II to the Venetians in February 1187 (*Ysaakius imperator et moderator Romeorum*).<sup>26</sup> In conclusion, Narad's charter is most likely a dim reminiscence of the harassment that the Hungarian army had to face on the road through the theme of Bulgaria.

Because of those circumstances, it took six weeks for the crusaders to move from Braničevo to Philippopolis. Once there (August 24, 1189), the crusaders realized that the city had been evacuated, and its fortifications destroyed. Responsible for all that was no other than the (future) historian Niketas Choniates, who was the commander of the city at that time. Out of all inhabitants of the city, only the Armenians stayed behind to meet the crusaders. Since Armenians were religiously persecuted in Byzantium, their attitude towards the crusaders is understandable.<sup>27</sup> Frederick I's army occupied Philippopolis, and the whole of Thrace. In Tageno's words, "the whole of Macedonia right up to the walls of Constantinople is subject to our orders and obeys our will. The cities and castles are in our hands, nor is there anyone who dares complain on hearing our name. The Vlachs are our allies. The Armenians are our loyal subjects. Our lord the emperor intended to spend the winter at Philippopolis."<sup>28</sup>

Such words appear after the speech Frederick I gave to Isaac II's envoys, threatening to attack Constantinople. The mention of the Vlachs as allies in a possible battle with Isaac II was meant to be a decisive argument for intimidating the emperor.

26 Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 189.

27 Vardan, c. 79–80 (Thomson 1989, 209–210); Cheynet 1990, 452; Dančeva-Vasileva 1998, 26–29; Dédéyan 2009, 673–674; Oppl 2011, 299–301.

28 Tageno, 510 (transl. Loud, 152): "Tota Macedonia usque ad muros Constantinopolitanis titulis subiecta est et ad voluntatem nostram servit. Urbes et castella in manu nostra sunt, nec est qui audeat audito nostro nomine mutire. Blaci nobiscum sunt. Armeni fideles nostri sunt, Dominus noster imperator apud Philippopolim intendit hiemare."

Frederick I was furious about what had happened at Philippopolis. The emperor's letter sent to his son Henry on the November 16, 1189 and copied in Ansbertus' account confirms Tageno's testimony. Frederick was now ready to attack Constantinople. Henry was instructed to gather a fleet from the Italian cities, but the plan eventually failed. The reasons for which Frederick did not follow through on his intention to attack the Byzantine capital remain unknown. The crusading army had a strategic advantage by having occupied the access road to the capital and could use the help of the Vlachs, Bulgarians and Cumans. Perhaps Frederick I knew that no military action was possible without naval forces, which have not been gathered as planned. Be as it may, Frederick I did not move against Constantinople, but instead left Philippopolis on November 5, and moved to Adrianople, where he arrived on November 22. His intention was to spend the winter in that city. While in Adrianople, he received again envoys from the leaders of Serbia and the Vlach-Bulgarian state, who were still placing their hopes in an anti-Byzantine alliance. In December 1189, Peter supposedly made an offer of 40,000 Vlach and Cuman archers as military assistance to the emperor, in exchange for his recognition of Peter's title of emperor of Greece, i.e., of the Byzantine Empire:

Kalopeter, the lord of the Vlachs and the greater part of the Bulgarians in the region of Thrace, who [called himself] emperor, [sent an envoy and] earnestly entreated that the imperial crown of the kingdom of the Greeks might be given to him. He made a firm offer that he would in early spring send forty thousand Vlachs and Cumans armed with bows and arrows to him [Frederick] [to fight] against Constantinople.<sup>29</sup>

The same number (40,000) appears in the *Historia peregrinorum*, but only as Cumans, and the offer of military assistance comes from both Peter and his brother Asan (*qui cum Assanio fratre suo dominabatur populis Blacorum*).

29 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 58 (transl. Loud, 84; FLHB III, 279): "Kalopetrus, Blacorum et maxime partis Bulgarorum in hortis Tracie dominus, qui se imperatorem nominabat et legatos misit ad imperatorem, qui eum salutabant et coronam imperialem regni Grece ab eo sibi imponi efflagitabat seque ei circa initium veris quadraginta milia Blacorum et Cumanorum tenentium arcus et sagittas adversus Constantinopolim transmissurum constanter asseverabat." See Wolff 1949, 184; Brand 1968, 92; Johnson 1969, 101–105; Primov 1975, 49–50; Decei 1978, 94–95; Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 102; Cankova-Petkova 1982, 71–72; Oppl 1986, 87; Gjuzelev 1987, 113; Teoteoi 1989, 91; Fine 1994, 24–25; Iosipescu 1994, 267–268; Gagova 1998, 123; Stephenson 2000, 297–299; Dall'Aglio 2003, 80; Vásáry 2005, 44; Curta 2006, 361, 372; Tyerman 2006, 423–424; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 42; Dall'Aglio 2010, 414; Ritter 2010, 58–59; Oppl 2011, 305–307, 310–312; Ritter 2013, 193; Iosipescu 2013b, 24.

Much like Ansbertus, Richard of Holy Trinity has Peter requesting the crown (“diadem”) of Greece from Frederick.<sup>30</sup> Albertus Miliol has a slightly different version of the events: “Kalopetrus the king of the Vlachs asked our king to put the diadem on his head, and the all-mighty emperor kindly obliged” (*Kalopetrus dominus Blacorum ab imperatore nostro sibi diadema rogavit imponi. Cui serenissimus imperator amicabile dedit responsum*).<sup>31</sup> All the three sources mention Peter’s wish to receive a crown, which is called either *corona imperialis* or *diadema*. This could only mean that, much like Stephen Nemanja, Peter regarded the German emperor as an external source of political legitimacy that could replace the Byzantine emperor and grant him the right to rule over territories taken from the Byzantines. Most historians believe that by such means Peter (and Nemanja) was ready to become Frederick I’s vassal.<sup>32</sup> However, the fact that Peter was not requesting a mere crown, but wanted to have the crown of Greece reveals an even greater ambition. He felt that the time was ripe for a drastic change in Constantinople. With Frederick I’s support, he would take the usurper Isaac II’s place. Frederick was seriously considering an attack on the Byzantine capital, which was at a distance of only five marching days from Adrianople. That is why Peter offered 40,000 soldiers as military assistance. Modern historians often neglect to mention that Frederick I eventually took into consideration the possibility of attacking Constantinople with the help of his Vlach and Serbian allies, but too late:<sup>33</sup> “This same emperor also sent letters and envoys to recruit galleys from Italy, Apulia and other coastal regions, while he held an army of more than 60,000 Serb and Vlach auxiliaries ready” (*Naves, etiam galeas ab Italia et Apulia et maritimis idem providus imperator per litteras et nuntios preparaverat, exercitum quoque auxiliariorum Servorum et Blacorum ultra sexaginta milia in promptu habebat*).<sup>34</sup>

Over the two months that passed since Peter first promised 40,000 soldiers, negotiations may have continued about the conditions under the Vlachs from Haemus could assist the emperor. Meanwhile, the Serbs offered another 20,000. This resulted in 60,000-strong contingent, which is considerable, when compared to the 100,000 men in the crusading army, especially when considering, as Frederick most certainly did, that the Vlach and Serbian warriors had been seasoned in battle against the Byzantine army. The context was favourable to a certain victory. If counterfactual arguments are of any use in the under-

30 *Historia peregrinorum*, ed. Chroust, 149 (FLHB III, 241).

31 Albertus Miliol, 648.

32 Tăpkova-Zaimova 1985, 34–35; Stephenson 2008, 688; Dobychina 2015, 343–344.

33 Only Zimmert 1903, 72–77, Decei 1978, 95 and Ritter 2010, 92 insisted on this fact.

34 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 68 (transl. Loud, 94; FLHB III, 289); Opll 1986, 87.

standing of history, then the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade could have easily taken place in 1190 with the help of the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, the Cumans, and the Serbs. The German emperor must have been really tempted to accept Peter's proposal, but he eventually turned it down, because he wanted to set off for the Holy Land as soon as possible—the ultimate goal of his expedition. On the other hand, it is unlikely that Frederick I would have granted Peter the imperial title, which he would have regarded exclusively as his own. According to the political views prevalent at that time, Frederick I considered himself to be the *only* Roman emperor; the leaders in Constantinople were just kings of the Greeks.<sup>35</sup> When, in retaliation, Isaac II called Frederick “king of the Germans,” the German emperor is said to have taken offense.<sup>36</sup>

Two competing ideologies seem therefore to have clashed in the political circumstances of the late 1189: on one hand, the idea that there was only one (legitimate, Roman) empire, be that Western or Eastern; on the other hand, the idea of a “substitute empire” created by the Bulgarians who imitated Byzantium on a smaller scale (the First, and now the Second Bulgarian Empire). For Peter, the title of emperor had nothing to do with the idea of universal monarch, but everything to do with that of a sovereign ruler of a “national” state (Bulgaria). This, of course, was the exact opposite of Emperor Frederick I's views. It is remarkable that neither Niketas Choniates, nor any other Byzantine writer was aware of the specific nature of Peter's ambitions, which he seems to have revealed only to Frederick. At any rate, to the crusaders Peter was simply the *dominus* of a *terra Blacorum*. Ansbertus employs the phrase *terra* in the account of the crusaders attacking a number of towns at some point in early February 1190:

The first of these forces, which was that of the Bishop of Würzburg and the counts of Salm, Wied and Spanheim, went towards the land of the Vlachs, capturing two towns that had been abandoned by the enemy and bloodily storming a third, where more than five thousand [of the enemy] were killed. One of these cities was set on fire.<sup>37</sup>

35 Brezeanu 2001, 69.

36 Gagova 1998, 119–120.

37 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 63 (transl. Loud, 89; FLHB III, 284): “Unum quidem agmen quod erat episcopi Wirzburgensis et comitum de Salm et de Widin et de Spanhaim, versus terram Blacorum duas civitates ab hostibus relictas et tertiam bellica manu cum multo sanguine ultra quinque milia occisorum expugnarunt; una ipsarum civitatum incendio data

The information in this account is confirmed by Gottfried, Bishop of Würzburg, in his *Epistola de morte Friderici Imperatoris*.<sup>38</sup> According to Gottfried, the troops under his command conquered and set on fire a fortress named *Maniceta*, which also appears in the *Historia peregrinorum* under a slightly different name, *Manikava*.<sup>39</sup> This fortress was not far from the *terra Blacorum*. *Maniceta/Manikava* is most likely Mneiakos or Moniak, a fortress taken by the army of the Latin Empire of Constantinople in 1206. It is located at about 5 km to the east from Kărdžali, next to Široko pole, on the way to Stenimachos.<sup>40</sup> Gottfried and his troops thus moved from south to north, and not the other way around. “The land of the Vlachs” is most likely Vlachia of the Assanids, and not Vlachia in Thessaly.

Without a strong army, pressured to set up an alliance, and tired of the devastation inflicted by the crusaders upon Thrace, on February 14, 1190, Isaac II concluded a peace treaty with Frederick I at Adrianople. He promised that he would deliver the necessary food supplies to the ships that would move the crusaders across the Hellespont.<sup>41</sup> The crusading army indeed crossed into Asia Minor, but it would fall apart after the emperor drowned while crossing the river Saleph (Göksu) in Cilicia on June 10, 1190.

According to the Armenian historian Vardan Arewelc'i, upon the crusaders' move to Asia Minor, the people in Constantinople “transported for free all those whom the Franks had recruited in the land of the Vlachs and Bulgarians, together with a lot of treasures; they also crossed into those lands”. Aurel Decei's (Romanian) translation of this short note followed Edouard Dulaurier's French translation.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Armenian author specifically mentioned two, not one country—the country of the Vlachs, and the country of the Bulgarians. Such an usage reminds one of that in the correspondence between Pope Innocent III and Johannitsa. It is not known what was Vardan's source of information about those events. In the other history written in Armenian at about the same time by Smbat, the crusade is not covered in as much detail. One possibility is that Vardan learned about Vlachs and Bulgarians from Armenians

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est.” See Decei 1978, 94; Opll 2011, 314. Brezeanu 1980, 664 has wrongly understood this passage as referring to the lands “beyond the city of Vidin.”

38 For Gottfried as author of the *Epistula*, see Zimmert 1901.

39 *Epistola*, 173.

40 Geoffroy, c. 435, 440 (ed. Faral, 248–249, 254–255; transl. Fluieraru, 176, 178); Asdracha 1976, 56, 152–153; Gagova 1985, 108; Soustal 1991, 365; Barakov 2015, 224.

41 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 64–66 (transl. Loud, 90–92; FLHB III, 285–287); Zimmert 1902; Johnson 1969, 108–109; Cankova-Petkova 1982, 73; Tyerman 2006, 425; Opll 2011, 314–316.

42 Decei 1978, 92 (the English translation is mine).



in Philippopolis. But Aurel Decei's translation is defective in other respects as well. Robert Thomson's English translation of the same passage is worth citing in full: "ferrying across gratis the whole host, with all the treasures that they had taken from the Vlachs and the Bulgarians as they passed through their lands."<sup>43</sup> What was crossed over into Asia Minor were therefore not the people, but the goods taken from the local population in the Balkans. Given that Vlachia in Thessaly was plundered by the crusaders, that must be the region in which the treasures were taken from the Vlachs. Bulgarians, on the other hand, were those who lived in the theme of Bulgaria, namely the road from Braničevo to Philippopolis. In other words, Vardan's testimony had no bearing either on the Vlach-Bulgarian state of the Asanids, or the recruitment of Vlachs and Bulgarians by the crusaders, as Decei initially believed.<sup>44</sup> However, it confirms the general picture about what happened in the course of the crusade's crossing the Balkans.

Once the danger of the crusaders was gone, Isaac II could return to his war with the Vlachs and the Bulgarians. Shortly after the treaty of Adrianople, he proposed to Frederick an alliance against Bulgaria, but Frederick I refused as he wanted to move on with his crusade. On that same day (February 27, 1190), the German emperor received Peter's envoy who made a third (and final) offer of alliance against Isaac II:

At that time the great steward of the Emperor of Constantinople, who had mustered a very large army to defeat the forces of the Vlachs, their public enemies, sent an embassy to request the lord emperor that, since he and his lord the Emperor of Constantinople were now joined together in peace and brotherhood, he would send the glorious army of the pilgrims of Christ to assist him in fighting against these Vlachs. On that very same day Kalopeter, the lord of the Vlachs, who was called by his own men Emperor of Greece, earnestly entreated by letter the help of the pilgrims of Christ against the army of the Greeks; but both envoys sought the help of the lord emperor in vain and returned home.<sup>45</sup>

43 Vardan, c. 80 (Thomson 1989, 210). Spinei 2006, 406 does not know this study.

44 Decei 1978, 95.

45 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 69 (transl. Loud, 94–95; *FLHB III*, 290): "Eo tempore dapifer magnus Constantinopolitani imperatoris qui exercitum pergrandem adunaverat, ut Blachorum hostium publicorum agmina perturbaret, transmissa legatione supplicavit domno imperatori, ut, quoniam pax inter ipsum et domnum suum Constantinopolitanum imperatorem fratrem imperii eius unita esset, gloriosum exercitum peregrinorum Christi sibi transmitteret in adiutorium ad dimicandum contra Blachos. Ipsa nichilominus die

In the aftermath of those events, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians continued their attacks, taking advantage of the absence of the Byzantine army from Thrace. At the same time, and probably following an agreement, the Serbs attacked northern Macedonia in 1190, where they sacked Skopion (Skopje). They may have also occupied the region between Braničevo and Niš.<sup>46</sup> Isaac II responded first with an expedition against Tărnovo (see Map 2). The expedition was launched in July 1190, as indicated by one of Niketas Choniates's orations. That text mentions that the army was equipped with stone-hurling catapults (*petroboloi*) and battering rams for the destruction of "fortifications with towers," a clear indication that the goal of the expedition was to besiege a well fortified city. Choniates also mentions military confrontations in the Danube region:

Yesterday and the day before yesterday, believing it is a thing worthy of the royal wisdom to meet the invasion of the Scythians over the Istros against us, you turned thoughts into action. And you almost turned the sea of Propontis into dry land with the help of boats, spreading them all over its surface. And the deep and turbulent Istros carries them, pushed by a good wind, moving close to its little islands. And this river, after many years, was hit by Romeic paddles; just a bit more and, after taking with it the voices and troubles of the barbarians, it will flow full of blood into the Pontos Euxinos, informing all peoples who live in the lands crossed by the river about your courageous deeds.<sup>47</sup>

Isaac's plan was to use fleet entering the Danube for preventing the Cumans from crossing the river. According to Genoveva Cankova-Petkova, however, that part of the expedition never took place.<sup>48</sup> Be as it may, the plan may explain the presence of imperial seals of Isaac II in Isaccea.<sup>49</sup> They must have been attached to letters sent a commander in what was still an important strong-

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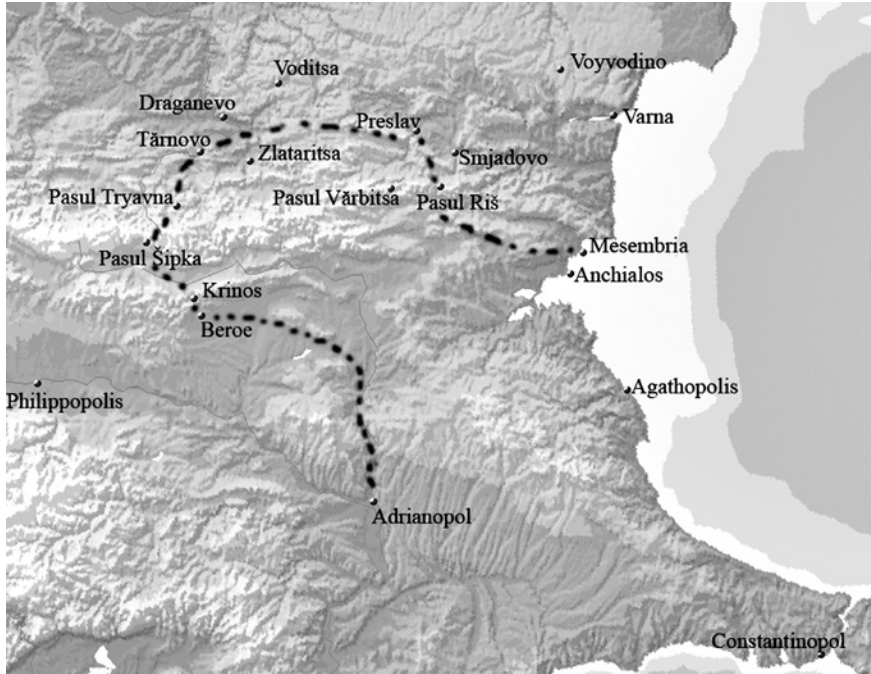
Kalopetrus Blachorum dominus itemque a suis dictus imperator Grecie, litteris directis auxilium Christi peregrinorum adversus exercitum Grecorum exposcit; sed utriusque nuntii a domno imperatore inefficaciter ad sua sunt reversi." See Onciu 1968, I, 413; Brand 1968, 92; Decei 1978, 95; Gjuzelev 1987, 114; Opll 2011, 318.

46 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 434; transl. Magoulias, 238; FHDR III, 272/273); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, Δ (ed. Van Dieten, 27–33); Laurent 1941, 122; Brand 1968, 93; Van Dieten 1971, 82; Makk 1989, 123; Fine 1994, 25; Ritter 2010, 92.

47 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, A (ed. Van Dieten, 3–4; FHDR III, 350/351); Van Dieten 1971, 61–64.

48 Cankova-Petkova 1981, 182; Marinow 2007a, 120–123. However, Gjuzelev 1986, 205 admitted the existence of the campaign to the Danube.

49 Diaconu 1978, 119; Barnea 1997, 359; Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 2001, 206; Ritter 2013, 200.



MAP 2 The Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 1190.

hold of Byzantine power in Dobrudja. In his letter to his son Henry, Frederick I mentions that “Kalopeter the Vlach and his brother Asan with the Vlachs subject to them were exercising tyrannical rule over much of Bulgaria, and especially in the region where the Danube flows into the sea” (*In Bulgariae maxima parte ac versus Danubium, quousque mare influat, quidam Kalopetrus Flachus ac frater eius Assanius cum subditis Flachis tyranizabat*).<sup>50</sup> If Frederick’s information is correct, then the rebels must have taken control of Dobrudja during the summer of 1189. The idea that the state created by Peter and Asan did not include that territory either before or after 1204 is not grounded in the existence evidence.<sup>51</sup> The reference to the mouth of the Danube in the fragment cited above is nonetheless quite clear. The empire’s priority was to maintain

50 Ansbertus, ed. Chroust, 33 (transl. Loud, 64; FLHB III, 257); Zlatarski 1972, II, 470–471; Brătescu 1919, 22; Decei 1978, 94; Koledarov 1979, 37; Iosipescu 1994, 266; Tanaşoca 2001, 118.

51 The idea was advanced by Romanian historians: Diaconu 1978, 118; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 131; Mănuclu-Adameşteanu 2001, 206–209; Iosipescu 2006, 50; Iosipescu 2013a, 108–109; Mărculeţ 2013, 125–126.

control over Thrace, and not a peripheral region like Dobrudja, with which the Byzantine could communicate only by sea.

The fleet ferried the Byzantine army to Mesembria. The troops went round Anchialos<sup>52</sup> and then continued westwards to the Haemus in order to attack Preslav and Tǎrnovo through the pass of Riš. Several coin hoards hidden in 1190 (Voditsa, Voyvodino, Draganovo, Zlataritsa, Preslav, and Smjadovo) have been linked to the expedition.<sup>53</sup> In the mountains, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians were placed in strategic and fortified points which allowed them to harass movements of the enemy: “He found the fortresses and citadels (φρούρια καὶ πολίχνη) there more strongly fortified than before with newly built walls marked off at intervals by crowned towers. The defenders without set their feet as harts upon high places, and as wild goats that haunt precipices shunned hand-to-hand combat.”<sup>54</sup>

Georgios Akropolites has a much shorter account of the expedition and only mentions Mesembria instead of Anchialos. Akropolites calls Στρίναβος the city besieged by the Byzantines.<sup>55</sup> Was that a misspelling of Tǎrnovo, which in other parts of Akropolites’s work is called Τρίνοβος? If so, Akropolites’s account contradicts Niketas Choniates’s account, in which there is no mention of Isaac II’s army reaching Tǎrnovo, even if it is clear from later accounts of the events that the army was heading in that direction.

At any rate, after only two months (around September 1190) the expedition was called off, and the army ordered to withdraw, because of an imminent new invasion of the Cumans from across the Danube. According to Akropolites, a Bulgarian fugitive had informed the emperor about this while Isaac was about to conquer Strinavos, and the trick worked. The army withdrew on a different, shorter route, in the direction of Beroe (Stara Zagora), as indicated by Niketas Choniates. That confirms, after all, that the initial goal of the expedition has been Tǎrnovo. The last operations before the withdrawal must have taken place in the area of present-day Gabrovo, to the north from the pass Tryavna. In that pass, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians ambushed the Byzantine army.

52 Niketas Choniates has mentioned only the bypassing of the city, but it was inferred that a landing took place somewhere in the area, at Mesembria (Gjuzelev 1986, 213). On the contrary, Cankova-Petkova 1981, 183–184 and Ritter 2013, 196 sustained that the army marched on the road along the seashore.

53 Žekova 2008, 122–123.

54 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 428–429; transl. Magoulias, 236; FHDR III, 268/269).

55 Teoteoi 1989, 94 has sustained that the name concerns a place other than Tǎrnovo, located near the Tryavna gorge (the same opinion at Lazăr 2004–2006, 58).

Unlike Akropolites, Niketas Choniates gives a long and detailed description of the ambush. Judging from the funeral oration written by Euthymios Tornikes for his father Demetrios, the Byzantine army obtained a victory against the Cumans on “the slopes of Zygos,” probably on the southern side of the Stara Planina. While withdrawing, the army was divided into three groups: the vanguard commanded by emperor’s cousin, Manuel Kamytzes, and by his son-in-law, the sebastokrator Isaac Comnenos; the main body of the army commanded under the command of the emperor of his brother, the sebastokrator Alexios (future emperor Alexios III); and the rearguard commanded by emperor’s uncle, John Dukas. The enemy allowed the vanguard to go through the pass, and then attacked the main corps under the direct imperial command. Isaac could not deploy his troops. He was defended by the cavalry and managed to flee. The Vlachs and the Bulgarians captured parts of the imperial treasury, including the pyramidal crown, the reliquary cross, and a fragment of the miracle-working belt of the Virgin Mary. Upon learning about the attack, the rearguard used another pass, probably Šipka, through which Litovoi, a Vlach or a Bulgarian in Byzantine service, guided John Dukas. Niketas Choniates’s account mentions a town named Krinos on the way between the pass through which the rearguard went (Šipka), and Beroe. That town is undoubtedly Krän, 6 km to the north from Kazanlyk.<sup>56</sup> That the ambush took place in the Tryavna pass, on the road between Tärnovo and Beroe, results from a number of coin hoards buried in that region in 1190.<sup>57</sup>

After the victory in the Tryavna pass (September 1190), the Vlachs, the Bulgarians and the Cumans continued their attacks in several directions. According to Niketas Choniates, they took Varna on the Black Sea shore, and sacked Anchialos. However, both were reoccupied by the Byzantines and rebuilt in 1193. In the fall, the attacks crossed the Stara Planina in the southwestern and western direction. Triaditza (Sredetz), present-day Sofia, was sacked and seriously destroyed. The attackers took the relics of Saint Ivan of Rila

56 Nikov 1939.

57 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 429–430; transl. Magoulias, 236–237; FHDR III, 268/269–270/271); Akropolites, c. 11 (ed. Heisenberg, 19; transl. Macrides, 133; FHDR III, 396/397–398/399); Euthymios Tornikes, ed. Darrouzès, 100 (FHDR III, 380/381–382/383); Zlatarski 1972, III, 63–72; Bachmann 1935, 87–89; Wolff 1949, 185–186; Guiland 1964, 134–135; Brand 1968, 92–93; Van Dieten 1971, 63–64; Malingoudis 1978, 80–81; Cankova-Petkova 1981, 181–185; Iosipescu 1984, 299–300; Gagova 1986b, 196; Gjuzelev 1986, 211–213; Soustal 1991, 141, 204, 324, 442; Stephenson 2000, 300; Vásáry 2005, 45; Curta 2006, 362; Lazăr 2006, 18–19; Žekova 2008, 117–123; R. Kostova, *Battle of Tryavna Pass*, in OEWMT, III, 379–380; Ritter 2010, 63–69; Ritter 2013, 197–198; Iosipescu 2013b, 25–26.

(see Figure 2) to Tărnovo, and a church was built for them on the Trapezitsa hill (church no. 8). The attackers then moved to Stumpion (Stob, at approximately 100 km south of Sofia, near the Rila Monastery). From Triaditza, they also reached Niš, from which plundered both captives and cattle. Niš was again in Byzantine hands as a consequence of Isaac II's counter-attack from Philippopolis in the late 1190 or early 1191. The Serbs were defeated somewhere on the Morava, and then up to Belgrade, where Isaac met his father in law, Béla III, King of Hungary. The reason for that meeting must have been a common plan against Bulgaria. The arrangement included Isaac's recognition of Serbian independence. To seal the arrangement, one of Stephen Nemanja's sons, who was also called Stephen, received the title of *sebastokrator* and married one of the emperor's nieces, Eudocia. From a Byzantine point of view, the arrangement was nonetheless advantageous, for the Byzantines regained control over the road along the Morava, including Niš and Braničevo. The area between Braničevo and Belgrade was also under Byzantine rule. Thus the Vlach-Bulgarian state was severed politically and territorially from its previous ally, Serbia. Isaac II's victory in the Morava valley effectively put an end to the coalition concluded in 1189 between the two rebel countries.<sup>58</sup>

Taking advantage of the Serbian defeat, Béla III occupied the area to the south from Braničevo during the winter of 1192–1193. He only gave up his claims to that area upon the requests of Pope Celestine III (1191–1198) and Isaac II. In his letter to the pope, Isaac informed him of the Hungarian king's push into the lands south of the Danube. This letter was written on behalf of the emperor by the logothete Demetrios Tornikes in 1193. Isaac complained about the dissension dividing Christians: "This passion that has taken over all those who call themselves Christians, after starting in Germany and Sicily, has spread even up to the ocean (.), and now, this passion which crossed the Ocean and the Rhine, is emptying into Paristria." The emperor complained about Béla III's attack against Stephen Nemanja, to whom Isaac II offered assistance, since he was now allied with him. The Byzantine emperor accused Béla III of breaking his oath not to act either against the empire or against Serbia, which he

58 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 434; transl. Magoulias, 238–239; FHDR III, 272/273); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, Δ (ed. Van Dieten, 27–33); *Regesten*, II, 97 (nr. 1605); Eustathios, 43 (FHDR III, 178/179: "the force and the arrogance of the Serbs were trampled by our emperor"); Georgios Tornikes II, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 277; *Life of St. Ivan of Rila*, in Petkov 2008, 263–264, 266, 348–349; Bachmann 1935, 68–71, 89–90; Laurent 1941, 119, 122–124; Guiland 1964, 135–136; Brand 1968, 93–94; Van Dieten 1971, 84–86; Gjuzelev 1986, 213–214; Schmitt 1989, 28; Makk 1989, 123; Fine 1994, 25–26; Stephenson 2000, 301; Dančeva-Vasileva 2004, 39; Vásáry 2005, 45–46; Maksimović 2005, 272; Curta 2006, 335; Dančeva-Vasileva 2008, 4–5, 7; Ritter 2010, 67, 93–98, 110; Ritter 2013, 198–199; Iosipescu 2013b, 27; Stanković 2015, 43–45.



FIGURE 2 *Saint Ivan of Rila.*

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan\\_Rilski\\_-\\_fresco\\_from\\_church\\_in\\_rila\\_monastery-bulgaria.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ivan_Rilski_-_fresco_from_church_in_rila_monastery-bulgaria.JPG),  
ACCESSED 8 JULY 2016.

regarded as tributary.<sup>59</sup> To judge from the letter, because of Serbia, the political relations between Isaac II and his father-in-law deteriorated rapidly.

After his victorious campaign against Serbia in 1190–1191, Isaac II Angelos decided to consolidate the empire's positions in Thrace, the province that has been the target of Vlach and Bulgarian attacks since 1186. The linchpin of the defensive system of Thrace was Philippopolis. In April 1191, in two night attacks, the army commanded by the emperor himself managed to repel the Cumans devastating the city's hinterland. The Cumans used the stratagem of the feigned retreat, but failed.<sup>60</sup> Niketas Choniates provides details of those events in his oration of 1191:

And after waiting for a while, you headed west, where you brought back to life our lands, destroyed as after a storm by the neighbouring barbarians, and you sent against them, the rebels of Haemus, your burning flame to kill the light in their eyes (...) No sooner had your thunders lit the hills of Haemus, that the rebel people and the Scythians, who rely on their arrows and have armed their hands against you, ran like the wild beasts in their cages (...). And our citizens from that part of the country go to work from dawn to dusk and are not disconcerted by any kind of fear.<sup>61</sup>

To trust the evidence of the oration, it seems that the Byzantines pushed the counteroffensive up to the Haemus and removed the threat of Vlach and Bulgarian attacks from the rich agricultural fields of Thrace, which supplied the capital with food.

The emperor appointed one of his cousins, Constantine Dukas Angelos, as *strategos* in 1192 and gave him the task to organize the defence of Philippopolis.<sup>62</sup> According to Niketas Choniates,

the Vlach rebels cowered in fear of him and were more panic-stricken at the sight of him than of the emperor. Often when Peter and Asan went

59 Demetrios Tornikes, ed. Darrouzès, 342/343 (see also the Introduction, 41); Laurent 1941, 125–127; Ostrogorsky 1956, 431; Makk 1989, 123; Fine 1994, 26; Ritter 2010, 99.

60 Eustathios, 41–45 (FHDR III, 177/178–181/182); Zlatarski 1972, III, 73–75; Bachmann 1935, 91–93; Brand 1968, 94–95; Ritter 2010, 71; Ritter 2013, 200–201.

61 Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, Δ (ed. Van Dieten, 26–27; FHDR III, 356/357); Van Dieten 1971, 83–86.

62 Two seals with his name were published by Jordanov 2012 (one from Dolnoslav near Asenovgrad, and another one from a place in southern Bulgaria). See also Jordanov 2015, 260–261.



out with the intention of ravaging the lands around Philippopolis and Beroe, they did not escape Constantine's notice, and he pursued them, routing the battalions, so that they did not make as many sallies as before.

However, Peter and Asan continued to attack Thrace, which they regarded as part of their state, as it had been under the First Bulgarian Empire. To compound the problems, Constantine attempted to usurp the imperial throne, was dismissed, and the emperor ordered his eyes gouged out.

So greatly did the Vlachs rejoice, and Peter and Asan exult, over the fate of Constantine that they spoke of making Isaakios emperor over their own nation, for he could not have benefited the Vlachs more than by gouging out Constantine's eyes. This showed how clever they were in these matters, and they sneered at the progressive decline of Roman affairs as they succumbed more and more to an evil lot. They prayed that the Angelos dynasty would be granted a reign of many years over the Roman Empire and earnestly entreated the Divinity that, if it were possible, they should never see death or be removed from the throne. These accursed indulged in predicting future events, giving as their reason that as long as the Angeloi reigned, the successes of the Vlachs would increase and be magnified, that they would acquire foreign provinces and cities, and that rulers and princes would come forth from their loins.<sup>63</sup>

The short time span, during which operations against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians were under the command of Constantine Dukas Angelos, coincide with the restoration of the Byzantine power in Thrace. That was sufficient apparently for George Tornikes II for entertaining hopes in his oration delivered in the fall of 1193 that Bulgaria will eventually be reconquered. In that oration, he mentions that Peter was forced to make peace, and that the emperor was kind enough to forgive him.<sup>64</sup> A similar idea may be found in the oration delivered by Sergios Kolyvas on January 6, 1193. In that oration, he reminded his audience of the mountains that had helped the enemy during Isaac's military

63 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, 111 (ed. Van Dieten, 435–437; transl. Magoulias, 239–240; FHDR III, 272/273–274/275); Zlatarski 1972, 111, 79–80; Wolff 1949, 186; Guiland 1964, 136; Brand 1968, 95–96, 111; Vlachos 1974, 163–164; Asdracha 1976, 234; Gagova 1986b, 197; Cheynet 1990, 127; Stephenson 2000, 303; Ritter 2010, 77–78; Ritter 2013, 205.

64 Georgios Tornikes II, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 262–266 (FHDR III, 384/385–388/389).

campaign.<sup>65</sup> On January 6, 1193, another oration was delivered by Constantine Stilbes. Although its first editor, Robert Browning, has dated the oration to the reign of Alexios I Comnenos, more recent studies have shown that the emperor to whom it was addressed was Isaac II. The date was established on the basis of the events narrated therein. The emperor is praised for having obtained a victory against the “Scytho-Bulgarians” in the area of Zygos.<sup>66</sup>

Before analysing the significance of those three speeches, it is important to note that Sergios Kolyvas’s phrase “Paristrion Scythians” implies that Cumans had by then settled in Paristrion (Paradunavon), a province that had been lost, even though its name was still remembered. Those Cumans continued to fight on the side of Asan, who led the Vlachs and the Bulgarians in the Haemus. Paristrion was the region in which the empire recognized the *de facto* (but not the *de iure*) rule of the rebels. Frederick I’s knowledge of Kalopeter the Vlach and his brother Asan exercising “tyrannical rule over much of Bulgaria, and especially in the region where the Danube flows into the sea” is most likely based on information from Byzantine sources. The most obvious sign of that is the use of a word, *tyranizabat*, which is rare in Latin texts, but whose Greek equivalent is relatively common in contemporary Byzantine sources. Educated Byzantines used the word “tyrants” *tyrannoi* for illegitimate leaders, and some of whom were also called *toparchoi* (for example the Bulgarian tsars Symeon and Samuel, called so by Kekaumenos).<sup>67</sup> Niketas Choniates called “tyrant” both Johannitsa and the Vlach rebel from Macedonia, Dobromir Chrysos.<sup>68</sup> One should keep in mind that what Peter and Asan demanded from the emperor at the very beginning was the *toparchy* of Moesia.

According to several historians,<sup>69</sup> the evidence of the three orations suggests a rift between Peter and Asan, the direct result of a typically Byzantine diplomatical activity aimed at creating strife within the enemy camp. Did Isaac II promise anything to Peter, or did he simply threaten him? It is curious that Niketas Choniates, who was usually very well informed, has nothing to

65 Sergios Kolyvas, *Logos*, ed. Regel, 293–294 (FHDR III, 374/375–376/377); Marinow 2006, 193.

66 Constantin Stilbes, ed. Browning, 38–39; Ritter 2010, 76; Ritter 2013, 204.

67 Kekaumenos, c. 82, 169 (transl. Beck, 67, 114 = ed. Spadaro, 122/123, 202/203 = FGHB VII, 20, 23); Cheynet 1984, 217.

68 Ioniță: Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, IA (ed. Van Dieten, 11; FHDR III, 370/371); Dobromir Chrysos: Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 502; transl. Magoulias, 277; FHDR III, 292/293).

69 Kazhdan 1965, 168–174; Brand 1968, 95; Stephenson 2000, 302. Yet, Mărculeț 2009a, 125–127 considers that the Byzantine intrigues failed, because Asan yielded a part of his power to Peter.

say on this subject. In any case, the peace was the direct consequence of the consolidation of the empire's military power due to the efforts of Constantine Dukas Angelos. (If counterfactual arguments are one more time allowed in this book, then it is quite possible that the Vlach-Bulgarian state would have been on the verge of extinction, had Constantine succeeded in his attempt to usurp the imperial power). The rift between the two brothers could be dated to 1192 on the basis of the date of two of the three speeches—January 6, 1193.

On the other hand, it is known that at some point Peter relocated his residence to Preslav, and that the surrounding territory up to Provaton (Provadija) was called “Peter’s land.”<sup>70</sup> Some historians believe it was a peaceful division of power, or a concession under the form of something similar to an appanage,<sup>71</sup> but others see in this move an expression of the 1192 rift between the two brothers,<sup>72</sup> even though the date of Peter’s retreat to Preslav is not known. Still others maintain that there was a dual leadership from the very beginning, with Asan in Tărnovo and Peter in Preslav.<sup>73</sup> However, that comes in contradiction with Akropolites’s statement. The only undeniable fact is that in 1192 only Asan continued to fight against the Byzantine Empire, while Peter, who three years earlier had dreamt of becoming emperor of Constantinople, retreated to the old capital in Preslav. How large was the territory under his rule remains unknown, but it is clear that Peter was still in Preslav in 1196 (see below).<sup>74</sup> After the rebellion started and the first attacks took place in the spring of 1186, Peter may have preferred peace over war, even at the price of limiting expansion in the lands south of the Haemus. Whether or not such a tendency coincided with a consolidation of his polity, the peace treaty between him and Isaac II was most likely similar to that between the emperor and Stephen Nemanja.<sup>75</sup>

In his chrysobull of June 1192 for the Ragusan merchants, Isaac II granted them trade privileges within the entire empire, as well as within the kingdom

70 Akropolites, c. 12 (ed. Heisenberg, 20; transl. Macrides, 137; FHDR III, 398/399).

71 Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 103; Cankova-Petkova 1982, 72; Mavromatis 1985, 33; Božilov 1985, 41; Biliarsky 1999, 180, 199; Iosipescu 2006, 50; Nikolov 2007, 261; Dall’Aglia 2008–2009, 42–43; Mărculeț 2009a, 127; Lazăr 2010, 9; Dall’Aglia 2011b, 601; Iosipescu 2013a, 108; Iosipescu 2013b, 27.

72 Kazhdan 1965, 174; Stephenson 2000, 302; Curta 2006, 361 (who has wrongly dated the divergence in the spring of 1193); Ritter 2010, 73; Ritter 2013, 202–204.

73 Angelov 1984, 51.

74 Biliarsky 1999, 199 supposed that the southern limit of Peter’s territory was Stara Planina, but said nothing about the northern limit. Nikolov 2007, 261 believed that Peter’s territory covered the whole of the north-eastern part of present-day Bulgaria and Dobrudja all the way up to the Danube Delta, but there is no evidence to support that belief.

75 Stephenson 2000, 303.

of Bulgaria.<sup>76</sup> This curious expression could only mean that the emperor at that time exercised authority over the (former) part of Bulgaria, which was located south of the Haemus (Zygos). Such a situation could only be the result of the 1191 counteroffensive in Thrace. However, the phrase “kingdom of Bulgaria” may also refer not to the entire Vlach-Bulgarian state, but only to the territory under the authority of Peter, with whom Isaac had just concluded the peace. Be as it may, the chrysebull shows that in the spring of 1192, the Byzantine authority in the eastern Balkans was partially restored.

After the dismissal of Constantin Dukas Angelos, the Vlachs and the Bulgarians resumed their raids, and Thrace came again under attack. Unlike the earlier raids, those were now organized together with Asan’s Cuman allies, which considerably increased the devastation. Moreover, large cities such as Philippopolis, Adrianople, and Serdica were also attacked. Between 1192 and 1194, the Byzantine defense of Thrace gradually evaporated.<sup>77</sup>

In such a critical situation, and in order to put a stop to the Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman devastations, an army was transferred in 1194 from Asia Minor under the command of Alexios Gidos, the *domestikos* of the Orient. The fresh forces were mixed with those already in Thrace, under the command of Basil Vatatzes, the *domestikos* of the West. There are no details about the operation, but the joint forces were utterly defeated at Arkadiopolis, a battle mentioned in Niketas Choniates’s *History*. The location is significant: Arkadiopolis (Lüleburgaz) is not far from Constantinople, which shows that the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, and the Cumans had access to the vicinity of the capital. Whether or not the defeat was caused by some rivalry between the two *domestikoi* Gidos abandoned the battlefield, while one of the many casualties on the Byzantine side was Basil Vatatzes. As a consequence of this great victory, Peter and Asan extended their power over a great part of Thrace, including Philippopolis. The Byzantine were compelled to move the defense line on the Rhodopi Mountains.<sup>78</sup>

After the disaster at Arkadiopolis, Isaac II quickly put an end to the tense relations with his father-in-law, and planned a joint campaign with Béla III for the summer of 1195. Before anything could be done, however, he

76 Bogišić, Jireček 1904, LXII; *Regesten*, II, 100 (nr. 1611); Cankova-Petkova, Primov 1966, 81–82. The Greek original being lost, only the Italian translation is available.

77 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 437; transl. Magoulias, 240; FHDR III, 274/275); Stephenson 2000, 303; Ritter 2010, 78.

78 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 446; transl. Magoulias, 245; FHDR III, 276/277); Zlatarski 1972, III, 80–81; Wolff 1949, 186; Guiland 1964, 137; Brand 1968, 96, 112; Iosipescu 1984, 301; Fine 1994, 27; Stephenson 2000, 303; J. Barker, *Battle of Arcadiopolis* (1194), in OEWMT, I, 59–60; Külzer 2008, 265; Ritter 2010, 78; Ritter 2013, 206.

was overthrown in early April 1195 by a conspiracy led by his brother Alexios (who became emperor Alexios III). At that time, the army was heading to Thessaloniki, under the threat of Vlach attacks. The Hungarian army was supposed to cross the Danube at Vidin, an indication that Isaac's initial plan was for Béla to attack the western parts of the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire.<sup>79</sup> From Vidin, the Hungarians could advance through Lovitzon to Tărnovo.

Once on the throne, Alexios III, who did not share his brother's aggressive towards the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, tried to reach peace with Peter and Asan, and ordered the return of the army that had just departed for the planned expedition. However, negotiations with Peter and Asan's envoys failed, and the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, and the Cumans renewed their attacks. The Byzantine army suffered a great defeat at Serrai (present-day Serres, in northern Greece). The general Alexios Aspietes was captured, and several towns were sacked. After being taken, those towns were occupied by Vlach-Bulgarian garrisons and remained under their control. First among them was Sredets (Sofia). The events of 1195 thus signal a new stage in the expansion of the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire in southern Thrace and Macedonia, along the valley of the river Strymon (Struma). Alexios III decided to send another army under the command of his son-in-law, the *sebastokrator* Isaac Comnenos. Near Serrai, Asan and Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman army lured the Byzantines into a trap. Isaac Comnenus ordered the attack, only to be surrounded by Vlachs, Bulgarians, and Cumans, who had until then been hiding. He fell prisoner, together with many others, and was taken to Tărnovo.<sup>80</sup>

One of the most important things captured by the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, and the Cumans in Beroe in 1195 was a mint used to produce the so-called "Bulgarian imitations" in Tărnovo, the first coins to be minted in the Second Bulgarian Empire. Those were billon coins of the trachea type, in three different varieties: imitations of an older issue of Manuel I Comnen; imitations of the first issue of Isaac II; and imitations of a contemporary issue of Alexios III. The first variety was struck between 1200 and 1203, the second between 1204

79 Niketas Choniates, *Isaakios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 447–451; transl. Magoulias, 245–247; FHDR III, 276/277); Hóman 1940, 437; Laurent 1941, 129; Wolff 1949, 186; Guiland 1964, 137; Brand 1968, 96, 111–113; Angold 1984, 274; Kosztolnyik 1987, 217; Makk 1989, 123–124; Schmitt 1989, 28; Papacostea 1993, 28; Fine 1994, 27; Dimitrov 1998, 111, 115; Stephenson 2000, 303–304; Vásáry 2005, 46; Ritter 2010, 79–80, 111–112; Ritter 2013, 206–207.

80 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 465–468; transl. Magoulias, 255–257; FHDR III, 278/279–282/283); *Regesten*, II, 102 (nr. 1631); Wolff 1949, 186–187; Ostrogorsky 1956, 433; Brand 1968, 125; Iosipescu 1984, 301; Fine 1994, 28; Stephenson 2000, 304; Dančeva-Vasileva 2004, 39; Vásáry 2005, 46; Dančeva-Vasileva 2008, 5–6; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 42; Lazăr 2010, 10.

and 1207, and the third after 1209. “Bulgarian imitations” have been found both to the north and to the south of the Haemus, in single or as hoard finds, the latter in assemblages dated before 1204 together with genuinely Byzantine coins. The reason for which this coinage appears may have something to do with the need the Vlach rulers had to pay their Cuman allies.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly after Alexios III became emperor, a new rebellion broke out in the region between the Struma and the Vardar rivers in Macedonia, a region that had already suffered at the hands of the Vlach-Bulgarian army. The leader of the rebellion was a man named Dobromir, also known as Chrysos, who was a Vlach. Even some Bulgarian historians still regard him as Bulgarian, Niketas Choniates’s testimony is unequivocal. According to Choniates, Dobromir was of Vlach origin (βλάχος τὸ γένος). Sometimes before the rebellion, he had led a group of 500 warriors (most likely Vlachs), who fought against the Vlachs and the Bulgarians north of the Haemus, on the side of the Byzantines. After the Byzantines were defeated, Dobromir, according to Choniates, wanted to have his own *dynasteia*, for until then he had been only the ally (ἔνσπονδος) of the Byzantines. Choniates’ use of *dynasteia* implies that within the territory in which Dobromir wanted to become a ruler, there had already been an autonomous region, a Vlachia. In other words, Dobromir wanted to rule independently over what was most likely a *toparchia*. To make his case, his troops sacked the hinterland of Serrai. Captured, he was released in 1196 and made commander of the citadel of Strumitza, most likely because his fighting skills were viewed as an important asset in the war against Peter and Asan. Dobromir rebelled again in 1197, and I shall return to his story in the following chapter.<sup>82</sup> For the moment, it is important to note that his (nick)name Chrysos means “gold” in Greek, but may have been a Graecization of the name *Hârsu*. Relatively common in Romanian onomastics, that name derives in fact from the Cuman word for “bear,” *chers*.<sup>83</sup> A Vlach named *Hrs* appears in fact in a charter of the Serbian king for the Monastery of St. Stephen in Banjska (Kosovo), dated in 1314.<sup>84</sup>

81 Hendy 1969, 218–222; Oberländer-Târnoaveanu 1989, 116–117; Hendy 1999, 46–47, 60–61, 66–80, 435–443; Stephenson 2000, 305; Curta 2006, 362; Ritter 2010, 68. The minting of these types of coins in Bulgaria has been denied by Metcalf 1979, 127.

82 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 487; transl. Magoulias, 267; FHDR III, 288/289); Zlatarski 1972, III, 120–122; Wolff 1949, 188; Brand 1968, 127; Van Dieten 1971, 131; Hoffmann 1974, 47, 90, 115; Cheynet 1990, 132; Fine 1994, 29; Stephenson 2000, 307; Curta 2006, 363; Nikolov 2013, 251, 255. Anagnostakis 2015, 156: “the uprising of the Asenids set a precedent for individuals such as Chrysos and Kamytzes, who in turn stirred up revolts and incited separatism among the local *archontes* in the south.”

83 Philippide 1916, 228; Bogrea 1921, 41–42.

84 Božanić 2010, 174.

Asan's reign ended at this point in a most unexpected manner. The following is the version of events as rendered by Choniastes. The *sebastokrator* Isaac Comnenos, who had been captured at Serrai in 1195, was being held prisoner in Tărnovo. He had promised his daughter's hand in marriage to a boyar named Ivanko (who, Georgios Akropolites claims, was presumably Asan's cousin). Isaac Comnenos may have hoped that, in this way, he could goad Ivanko into betrayal. He died in captivity, though, but Ivanko did not renounce the idea of marrying Isaac's daughter. Having lost hope eventually that he would ever marry a Byzantine princess, Ivanko had an affair with the sister of Asan's wife. Enraged by what he may have seen as illicit love, Asan summoned Ivanko to his presence in order to ask for an explanation. Advised by a group of conspirators, Ivanko came armed, and killed Asan with the sword that he had concealed under his garments. These events took place at some point in early 1196. Ivanko tried to get the population in Tărnovo on his side, claiming that he had liberated them from Asan's tyranny. Paul Stephenson assumed that Asan's association with the Cumans may have contributed to a climate of terror. In any case, had Ivanko just killed Asan, one would certainly be entitled to treat the episode as intradynastic strife and an usurpation of power. But Ivanko called on Alexios III and asked the Byzantium army to occupy Tărnovo. Peter was obviously no longer there, for he had moved to Preslav. Alexios III obliged, and the Byzantine left Philippopolis under the command of Manuel Kamytzes. However, before it got to the mountain passes, the soldiers rebelled, as they were afraid that their general was leading them into another ambush like that in the Tryavna pass, in which the Byzantine army had been under his incompetent command as well. The fears of the Byzantine soldiers in turn compromised Ivanko's hopes. Alexios III sent other troops to occupy the Bulgarian capital, but they too failed to reach Tărnovo. Ivanko eventually fled to Constantinople upon learning that Peter, informed about what had happened in Tărnovo, was approaching the city with his army, in order to assume power.<sup>85</sup>

The exact date of the return of Johannitsa from Constantinople is not known. He had been held hostage there since the spring of 1188. Some have assumed that Johannitsa was born around 1170, on the basis of the forensic analysis of the skeleton in grave 39 from the Church of the 40 Holy Martyrs

85 Niketas Choniastes, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 469–472; transl. Magoulias, 257–259; FHDR III, 282/283–286/287); Akropolites, c. 12 (ed. Heisenberg, 20; transl. Macrides, 137; FHDR III, 398/399); Wolff 1949, 187; Brand 1968, 125–126; Hoffmann 1974, 51–52; Božilov 1985, 33, 41; Cheynet 1990, 131; Kojčeva 1993, 131; Fine 1994, 28; Stephenson 2000, 305–306; Vásáry 2005, 46; Curta 2006, 363–364; Nikolov 2007, 262; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 42–43; Mărculeț 2010b, 286–287; Nikolov 2013, 252.

in Tărnovo. That grave was believed to be his, and the age of the skeleton was anthropologically determined to be between 35 and 40. Given that Johannitsa died in 1207, his birth, under that assumption, must have taken place around 1170.<sup>86</sup> The assumption, however, was seriously challenged (see chapter 6), and thus the argument is invalid. However, it is quite possible that Johannitsa was indeed born around 1170, because he must have been a teenager when he was taken hostage. At any rate, he must have returned to Bulgaria before Ivanko left Tărnovo for Constantinople. Indeed, Johannitsa was left in control of the city by his older brother Peter, after the latter secured the control of Tărnovo and then returned to Preslav. According to Choniates, Johannitsa had already “participated in the reign,” helping Peter. This may be a way to say that the dual leadership continued after Asan’s death. Someone in Peter’s entourage killed him soon after that, in 1197.<sup>87</sup> Asan’s son, also named John (Ioan), was a minor, so power reverted to the next in the line of succession—Johannitsa. He became the new emperor of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians.

This episode closes another chapter in the history of the Vlach-Bulgarian state. When Peter, its founder and first emperor died, that state had a well-defined territory between the Danube, the Rhodopi mountains and probably the Timok valley where it bordered Serbia. The military success that have led to the creation of that state were the result of multiple internal and external factors. Without underestimating the value of the Vlach and Bulgarian warriors and their independent aspirations, the militarily decisive role at this stage was that of the Cumans, especially in open-field offensive operations. They were professional warriors, well trained and well armed, qualities for which they had also been hired in the Byzantine army. Because of their large numbers and skills, the Cumans reduced the clear disparity between the professional army of the Byzantines, and the peasants and mountaineer army of Vlachs and Bulgarians. Another element contributing to the military victories of Peter and Asan was the advantage offered by the mountains in which several campaigns took place. Choniates made a special point in underlining the role of the mountains in the defense organized by the rebels. The latter were also very good

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86 Božilov 1985, 43, 56, 57.

87 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, 1 (ed. Van Dieten, 472; transl. Magoulias, 259; FHDR III, 286/287). The translation of this fragment in Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 102 is wrong. The author did not write that Johannitsa flew “when emperor Isaac launched the second campaign against the Mysians”. This assertion concerns the moment when he was taken hostage, as results from the translation made by Magoulias; Akropolites, c. 12 (ed. Heisenberg, 20–21; transl. Macrides, 137; FHDR III, 398/399); Wolff 1949, 188; Božilov 1985, 41; Kojčeva 1993, 131; Fine 1994, 29; Stephenson 2000, 306; Dall’Aglia 2008–2009, 42–43.



at exploiting the difficult situations in which the Byzantine army found itself under Isaac II. The emperor appointed a number of commanders who either betrayed him, or proved to be incompetent. Under Alexios Vranas (April 1187) and Constantine Dukas Angelos (1192), the Byzantine army could have capitalized on success, but both generals rebelled against the emperor. Many other generals were killed, captured, or fled from the battlefield: John Cantacuzenos (winter 1186–1187), Basil Vatatzes (Arkadiopolis, 1194), Alexios Aspietes (1195), Isaac Comnenos (1195), and Isaac II himself (Tryavna, September 1190). The events of 1196 also point to the low morale of the Byzantine army. It would have been inconceivable under Manuel I Comnenos for a Byzantine army such as that led by Manuel Kamytzes to refuse to go to battle. Under such circumstances, what has started as a relatively minor, local rebellion could easily grow into a full-blown state.

The capital of that state continued to grow, and new buildings were erected on the Tsarevets and Trapezitsa hills. During Peter and Asan's rule, the construction of the imperial palace began on top of the Tsarevets hill, where the residence of the Byzantine *strategos* had been situated. In the valley, on the exact spot where the rebellion had broken out, the Church of Saint Demetrios was erected shortly after the event. Moreover, the transfer of the relics of Saint Ivan of Rila to the Tărnovo gave the city a sacred area and connected the new regime with the First Bulgarian Empire,<sup>88</sup> in which St. John had been a luminary of the Golden Age under Symeon and Peter.

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88 Biliarsky 2008a, 171–173; Erdeljan 2009, 463; Dobychna 2015, 345–346.

## Johannitsa (1197–1207)

As soon as he remained sole ruler, Johannitsa, also known as *Kaloyan* or *Kaloyannes* (“John the Handsome”), resumed the raids into Thrace, following the policy of his brother Asan rather than Peter’s. Little is known about the details of those raids between 1197 and 1199, given that the only source covering that period, Niketas Choniates’ history, is laconic on this subject. At this point in his work, Choniates was more interested in Ivanko than in Johannitsa.

The former had escaped to Constantinople in 1196, where he was well received. He married not the daughter, but the widow of Isaac Comnenos—Theodora, a niece of Alexios III. The emperor put so much trust in Ivanko’s hatred towards Johannitsa that he immediately appointed him commander of the city of Philippopolis (which had been rebuilt after being dismantled in August 1189). After the wedding, Ivanko changed his name to Alexis. He displayed remarkable military skills in fighting successfully against his own people. Ivanko’s main concern was to restore the fortifications system in the Rhodopi Mountains, particularly Kritzimos (Kričim) and Stenimachos (Asenovgrad). The former was in fact built at his own initiative (on top of an older, 10th-century stronghold). Having secured control over those fortifications, Ivanko-Alexis turned against Alexios III in 1198. He signed a peace with Johannitsa, committing himself to join the latter in his fight against the empire. A new Vlach-Bulgarian polity thus appeared, the center of which was not in Tarnovo. That polity stretched from the Rhodopi Mountains, the rivers Strymon and Maritsa and from the Aegean Sea to eastern Macedonia and southern Thrace, and was populated by Bulgarians and Vlachs (see Map 3). Ivanko took residence in Philippopolis, where he received Alexios III’s envoy, a eunuch, who reminded Ivanko of his agreements with the emperor.<sup>1</sup>

The envoy returned without having achieved anything, and in 1199 Alexios III sent an army against Ivanko-Alexis, under the command of the same Manuel Kamytzes. Kamytzes took Kritzimos, but was then ambushed and the general was captured. A new expedition was sent in 1200, which obtained a victory

1 Even though the text in Niketas Choniates’s *History* is quite clear at this point, Franz Dölger once believed that that one receiving Alexios III’s embassy was Johannitsa (Kaloyannes), not Ivanko. The mistake was then reproduced in Ioan Mălinaș’s study. See *Regesten*, 11, 107 (nos. 1655, 1657); Mălinaș 2000, 57, 58.



MAP 3 *The fortifications from the Rhodopi and from eastern Macedonia.*

at Stenimachos. Ivanko-Alexis was invited at a meeting to discuss the peace, and against all promises that Alexios III had previously made to him, he was arrested. The lands in southern Thrace and northeastern Macedonia, which had been under the authority of Ivanko-Alexis, reverted to Byzantine rule.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1199, shortly before Kamytzes's expedition, another serious Cuman attack took place, in which the Vlachs participated as well. To judge from Niketas Choniates's words, the Vlachs in question may have been from the lands north of the Danube: "Scythians, with a crowd of Vlachs, crossing the Istros . . ."<sup>3</sup> The raid reached as far as Tzurullon (Çorlu), in the hinterland of Constantinople. However, on their way back to the Danube, the Cumans laden with booty were massacred by the Byzantine troops stationed in Vizye

2 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I; II (ed. Van Dieten, 473, 509–519; transl. Magoulias, 259, 281–285; FHDR III, 288/289, 300/301–306/307); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, Z (ed. Van Dieten, 53–68; FHDR III, 358/359–362/363); Nikephor Chrysobergos, 15–19; Wolff 1949, 188–189; Ostrogorsky 1956, 433; Brand 1968, 130–131; Van Dieten 1971, 98–101; Hoffmann 1974, 52–55, 92–95, 115; Asdracha 1976, 59–60, 234; Gagova 1986b, 197; Cheynet 1990, 132–133, 137; Soustal 1991, 325, 460; Fine 1994, 28–31; Curta 2006, 363–364; Lazăr 2006, 27–30; Külzer 2008, 139; Mărculeț 2009a, 128–131; Nikolov 2013, 252–254.

3 For that same interpretation, see Onciul 1968, I, 402; Philippide 1916, 229; Ștefănescu 1965, 225; Iroaie 1967, 107; Mărculeț 1998, 16; Ioniță 2005, 30; Lazăr 2004–2006, 59; Lazăr 2006, 20; Spinei 2009, 141; Mărculeț 2013, 125.

(today Vize).<sup>4</sup> In the fall of that same year, another Cuman raid reached Macedonia.<sup>5</sup> A third Cuman-Vlach raid took place sometime in 1201, and like that of April 1199, was directed against the hinterland of Constantinople. The Cuman raids from across the Danube ceased for a while, most likely because of Rus' attacks on the Cuman settlements in the steppe lands. The Rus' chronicles have in fact confirmed the testimony of Niketas Choniates: the prince of Halych, Roman Mstislavich (1199–1205) ravaged the Cuman lands in 1201 and, again, in 1203.<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to note that Choniates does not mention Johannitsa in relation to any of the three attacks of 1199–1201.<sup>7</sup> It is likely that the initiative for all of them came from among the Cuman chieftains in Moldavia or eastern Walachia. They affected the Vlach-Bulgarian tsardom too. In any case, the Vlachs in the lands north of the Danube were under Cuman rule, so they must have part in the war almost by default.

The only military action of Johannitsa was the campaign of March 1201, which started with the destruction of Constantia in Thrace (present-day Simeonovgrad, on the Maritsa river). During the 9th and 10th centuries, Constantia functioned as a key strategic point on the Bulgarian-Byzantine frontier. The participants in the Third Crusade were quartered there in 1190. The attack of 1201 resulted in the destruction of the ramparts. Although Choniates does not identify the attackers, he mentions Johannitsa leaving Moesia with “a very large army, all plated in copper (πανχάλκω).” The latter phrase is certainly to be taken metaphorically, but one can clearly assume that Johannitsa's army was better equipped and trained than all previous armies sent against Byzantium. The details of the campaign substantiate that conclusion. For the siege of Varna, which began on March 23, 1201, Johannitsa brought along “a four-sided mechanism, as wide as the moat and as high as the city wall.” The siege tower was then wheeled to the moat surrounding the city and pushed into it. The attackers were thus able to climb the city ramparts. After Varna was taken, the inhabitants were all massacred and the buildings razed to the ground.

4 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I (ed. Van Dieten, 499–501; transl. Magoulias, 275–276; FHDR III, 290/291–292/293); Brand 1968, 127–128; Diaconu 1978, 130; Lazăr 2004–2006, 59; Vásáry 2005, 47–48; Dall'Aglío 2008–2009, 44; Spinei 2009, 141; Külzer 2011, 202.

5 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 508; transl. Magoulias, 280); Brand 1968, 129–130; Diaconu 1978, 130; Vásáry 2005, 48; Külzer 2008, 290; Dall'Aglío 2008–2009, 45.

6 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 522–523; transl. Magoulias, 287; FHDR III, 306/307–308/309); Jireček 1876, 232–233; Wolff 1949, 189; Brand 1968, 132; Diaconu 1978, 130; Vásáry 2005, 48–49; Spinei 2006, 413; Spinei 2009, 141–142.

7 Dall'Aglío 2008–2009, 44 believes, however, that they had been ordered by Johannitsa.

Johannitsa's army then went back to Moesia, north of the Stara Planina. The most important result of the 1201 expedition was the Bulgarian occupation of two ports—Varna and Mesembria (although the latter is not specifically mentioned by Niketas Choniates, historians believe that it was conquered in 1201).<sup>8</sup>

The Cumans, who, in cooperation with the Vlachs, reached ever deeper into Thrace and even Macedonia between 1199 and 1201 seem to have prompted Dobromir Chrysos to raise in rebellion against Alexios III. Johannitsa thus gained an important ally at a time when Ivanko was still thwarting his plans from Philippopolis. The army himself decided to march against Dobromir Chrysos at the head of an army assembled in Kypsella. However, for reasons that Niketas Choniates does not explain, he refrained from attacking, and thus allowed the rebel to remain in charge of Strumitsa. Moreover, Dobromir Chrysos occupied Prosakos (Prosek) in Macedonia, an almost impregnable stronghold in the Demir Kapija gorge, through which flows the Vardar River (Dobromir Chrysos succeeded only because there was at that time no garrison inside the fortification). Alexios III himself put Prosakos under siege in the fall of 1199, but to no avail. He then tried to win Dobromir Chrysos on his side by different means. He first acknowledged his authority over Strumitsa and Prosakos, as well as over the entire region between the Strymon and the Vardar rivers. Dobromir Chrysos was given Manuel Kamytzes's daughter in marriage, and he later ransomed his father-in-law from Ivanko's captivity. The former Byzantine commander-turned-rebel then took part in raids into Macedonia, and as far as Peloponnesus. After making peace with Alexios III in the spring of 1202, the emperor sent to Dobromir another wife, namely Theodora who had been left without a husband after Ivanko's arrest. This maneuvering was meant to secure Dobromir Chrysos's loyalty.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Alexios III also concluded a peace with Johannitsa, who may have been convinced to deal with the emperor by the Cuman attacks of 1199–1201, which may have affected Bulgaria as well, if indeed those Cumans

8 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 532–533; transl. Magoulias, 292; FHDR III, 308/309–310/311); Brand 1968, 132; Asdracha 1976, 151–152; Božilov 1985, 45; Gjuzelev 1986, 215; Soustal 1991, 314; Fine 1994, 31–32; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 45–46; Purton 2009, 310.

9 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, I; II (ed. Van Dieten, 487, 502–507, 533–535; transl. Magoulias, 267, 277–280, 293–294; FHDR III, 288/289, 292/293–298/299, 310/311–312/313); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, IA (ed. Van Dieten, 107–111; FHDR III, 362/363–370/371); Nikephor Chrysobergos, 20–21; *Regesten*, II, 106–107 (nr. 1653); Wolff 1949, 188–189; Ostrogorsky 1956, 433–434; Brand 1968, 128–129, 133–134; Van Dieten 1971, 131; Hoffmann 1974, 47–48, 90–91; Cheynet 1990, 132; Fine 1994, 29–30, 32–33; Stephenson 2000, 307; Curta 2006, 364; Lazăr 2006, 24–27; Mărculeț 2009a, 120–124; Nikolov 2013, 257–258.

were not Johannitsa's allies. A much more important reason for Johannitsa's decision seems to have been Alexios III's defeat both of Ivanko and of Dobromir Chrysos, which had effectively left Johannitsa without any allies. Niketas Choniates mentioned the peace and the defeat of Dobromir Chrysos within one and the same passage. The events must have taken place in the spring of 1202. In one of his speeches, Choniates provides further details about Johannitsa:

he offers you his hand and he signs a treaty with you. He who was raising himself before in his thoughts neither more nor less than the mountains over there (...) remembered again his earlier state and thought of slavery, the companion of his youth<sup>10</sup> (...) The arrogant turned humble succumbed to your power (...) and, once again included among those who are attached to you by treaties, and among your allies, he escaped from slavery to a greater extent than by shaking it off.

The peace restored to the Byzantine the territories previously occupied in Thrace in exchange for the recognition of an independent empire in the lands north of the Stara Planina. In other words, the peace restored the situation before the battle of Arkadiopolis (1194), and established a stable frontier between Bulgaria and Byzantium. By means of quelling two rebellions, Alexios III pacified Thrace and Macedonia, while Ioniță secured his freedom of action in another direction.<sup>11</sup>

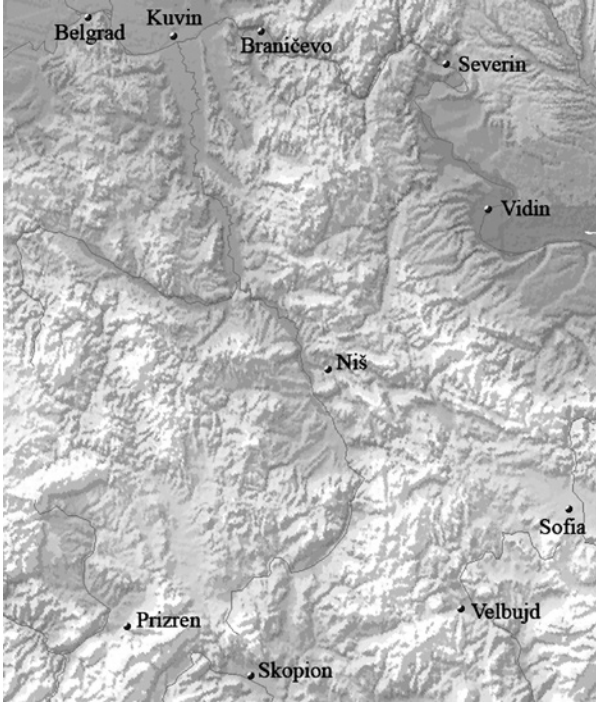
The polity ruled by Johannitsa initially stretched to the west and northwest as far as the area between Timok and Morava, including Vidin (see Map 4). The region between Belgrade and Braničevo was under Byzantine authority at least until the end of 1198, as indicated by the privilege granted by Alexios III to Enrico Dandolo, the Venetian doge, in November 1198. Braničevo (*Uranisouë*)<sup>12</sup> is mentioned alongside Niš (*provincia Nisi*) and Strumitsa (*provincia Strumice*) as one of the markets in the Byzantine Empire, to which the Venetian merchants were granted access.<sup>13</sup> Soon after that, however, Johannitsa took Braničevo, as

10 This seems to allude to Johannitsa being held hostage in Constantinople.

11 Niketas Choniates, *Alexios Angelos*, III (ed. Van Dieten, 535; transl. Magoulias, 294; FHDR III, 312/313); Niketas Choniates, *Speeches*, IA (ed. Van Dieten, 110–111; FHDR III, 368/369–370/371); *Regesten*, II, 107 (no. 1661); Brand 1968, 134; Van Dieten 1971, 131–132; Angold 1984, 275; Gagova 1986b, 197–198; Fine 1994, 31–32; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 84; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 46.

12 Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 261; *Regesten*, II, 105 (nr. 1647).

13 While ignoring this document, Curta 2006, 382 believed that the region of Braničevo was either a no man's land, or in Hungarian hands between 1185 and 1203.



MAP 4 *The region Belgrade-Vidin-Niš-Skopje.*

indicated by the mention in 1202 of a bishop of Braničevo named Blasius, who was a suffragan of the archbishop of Târnovo.<sup>14</sup>

Johannitsa entered negotiations with Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) in 1198. The first letter of the pope to Johannitsa is dated between December 1199 and early 1200. One of Johannitsa's letters of July 1203<sup>15</sup> suggests that the first attempt to get in contact with the pope had occurred in 1198 (he actually mentions six years that had elapsed, no doubt a mistake, for no more than five could have passed by then). Johannitsa's first envoy arrived in Rome only in late 1199. Johannitsa's letter written in late 1202—his first letter that

14 PL, vol. 214, 1112 (n. CXV), 1116 (n. CXVII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 2 (doc. II), 5 (doc. IV)—*Acta Innocentii III*, 227 (nr. 29)—FLHB III, 310, 314; Tăutu 1975, 202; Hintner 1976, 138–139; Koledarov 1979, 40; Mălinaș 2000, 110, 119; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 53.

15 PL, vol. 215, 155 (n. CXLII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 10 (doc. X) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 570 (no. 11) = FLHB III, 319; Wolff 1949, 194; Tăutu 1975, 204; Hintner 1976, 71; Lacko 1983, 195–196; Mălinaș 2000, 124–126; Turcuș 2001, 182; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 52–54, 74; Petkov 2008, 222.

has survived—mentions that his brothers Peter and Asan had earlier established contact with Rome. However, nothing of that sort is known from other sources, and such contacts may have been difficult to establish because of the hostility of the neighboring countries, particularly Byzantium and Hungary: “Even though my brothers of blessed memory tried to reach Your Holiness a long while ago, their efforts have been thwarted by many opponents. Just like them, having tried once, twice, and three times to reach Your Holiness, we have failed in our endeavor.” Johannitsa demanded a crown from the pope, since, as he wrongly assumed, his predecessors Peter and Samuel had also obtained crowns from Rome: “First and foremost I ask the Roman Church, our mother, for a crown and honor as a beloved son, like our old emperors had. One of them was Peter, the other Samuel, as well as other predecessors, as I found written in our books.”<sup>16</sup>

The pope’s first letter reached the “noble man Ioannitus” in December 1199 through the papal envoy, Dominic, the Greek archpresbyter of Brindisi. In that letter, the pope mentions Johannitsa’s military victories, supposedly facilitated by his loyalty to the Roman-Catholic Church: “The Lord saw the humility and devotion we knew you held for the Roman Church that not only strongly protected you in the uproar and dangers of the wars, but in a miraculous and gracious way helped it (your reign) to expand.”<sup>17</sup> This suggests that

16 PL, vol. 214, 1112–1113 (n. CXV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 2 (doc. 11) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 563 (no. 8) = FLHB III, 310: “Et quamvis fratres mei bonae memoriae jamdudum voluerint mittere sanctitati vestrae non tamen ad vos pervenire propter multos nostros contrarios potuerunt; et nos similiter probantes semel, secundo et tertio ad vos dirigere, deducere non potuimus quod optabamus in fructum) (...) In primis petimus ab ecclesia Romana matre nostra coronam et honorem tamquam dilectus filius, secundum quod imperatores nostri veteres habuerunt. Unus fuit Petrus, alius fuit Samueli et alii, qui eos imperio precesserunt, sicut in libris nostris invenimus esse scriptum.” See Wolff 1949, 192; Tăutu 1975, 202; Hintner 1976, 22, 24–25, 29–31; Gjuzelev 1977a, 42; Brătianu 1980, 78; Tăpkova-Zaimova 1985, 32; Dančeva-Vasileva 1986, 98; Mălinaș 2000, 107–111; Turcuș 2001, 183; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 38, 52–54; Petkov 2008, 219–221; Kaymakamova 2010, 222; Dobychina 2015, 347. In his letter of September 8, 1203 (see below), Johannitsa went as far as to make his predecessors emperors of both Bulgarians and Vlachs (*imperatores Bulgarorum et Blachorum Symeon, Petrus et Samuel*), a detailed largely ignored by modern Bulgarian historians.

17 PL, vol. 214, 825 (n. CCLXVI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 1 (doc. 1) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 207 (no. 17) = FLHB III, 308: “Respexit Dominus humilitatem tuam et devotionem quam erga Romanam Ecclesiam cognosceris hactenus habuisse, et te inter tumultus bellicos et guerrarum discrimina non solum potenter defendit, sed etiam mirabiliter et misericorditer dilatavit.” See Wolff 1949, 190–192; Tăutu 1975, 201–202; Hintner 1976, 22–28; Brătianu 1980, 75–78; Tanașoca 1981, 582; Armbruster 1993, 33–34; Mălinaș 2000, 105–106; Turcuș 2001, 182; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 38–40.



Johannitsa had been favorably inclined towards the Church of Rome for some time. What exactly that meant in practical terms remains unknown, but there is no conversion to Catholicism before the archbishop of Târnovo's declaration of unification with the Church of Rome (September 1203). It is of course quite possible that Peter and Asan, when exposed to the Third Crusade, for example, thought about getting in touch with Rome. Had Peter been recognized emperor by Frederick I, his crown could have come only with the blessings of Pope Clement III (1187–1191). However, there was no opportunity for the leaders of the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire to establish contact either with that pope, or with his successor, Celestine III. Such a contact could have been mediated only by the Hungarian king Béla III, who was, however, largely hostile to the Vlach rulers.

For Johannitsa, the unification with Rome was a means of obtaining international recognition of his power, of the imperial title (already adopted by his brother Peter) and a crown, which the head of his church, Archbishop Basil, was to place on Johannitsa's head. Still at war with Byzantium, Johannitsa could have obtained all of that from Rome, not Constantinople. When at war with Byzantium, Bulgarian rulers in the past—particularly Symeon and Samuel—had turned to Rome for recognition.<sup>18</sup> In Aloisius Tăutu's word, Johannitsa

found himself between the anvil and the hammer—the Byzantines to the south and to the northeast, the Hungarian king, who was the emperor's father-in-law and who had come to Sirmium to reach an agreement with his son-in-law about how best to crush the Vlach-Bulgarian rebellion. In order to fend off the threat from those two enemies, Johannitsa came to the conclusion that he had to win the favor of the most powerful spiritual and political sovereign in the world, the pope in Rome. To do so, he suggested to him that he was ready to accept the union with the Roman Church.<sup>19</sup>

No territorial expansion of the empire into Thrace is known for the period 1197–1199. What Innocent III may have therefore had in mind when referring to the expansion of Johannitsa's power was the conquest of the region between Vidin and Belgrade, which had once been part of Byzantium. The pope may have learned about those events from churchmen in the neighboring country of Hungary. He had also been in correspondence with Stephen II (1196–1228), the Serbian great župan, who may have also informed him about Johannitsa's

18 Dančeva-Vasileva 1986, 99.

19 Tăutu 1975, 198.

moves. It is therefore sure that Braničevo was taken either in the spring or in the summer of 1199. Moreover, northern Macedonia was also occupied during that time, as indicated by the expansion of the archbishop of Tärnovo's jurisdiction into that area. In the fall of 1203, the bishops of Velbužd (*Belesbud*), Skopje (*Scopia*) and Prizren (*Prisdiana*) are mentioned as suffragans of the archbishop of Tärnovo,<sup>20</sup> which strongly suggests that those lands had been incorporated into Bulgaria. Much like the sees of Belgrade and Braničevo, they had previously been under the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ohrid, when northern Bulgaria had been part of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>21</sup> There is in fact a list of the sees under the jurisdiction of archbishopric of Tärnovo, and that list confirms the information resulting from the pope's letter of 1203: "Those are the bishops of Bulgaria: the archbishop of Tärnovo, who is the primate, the archbishop of Velbužd, the archbishop of Preslav, Skopje, Prizren, Vidin, Loveč, and Braničevo."<sup>22</sup> By 1198, the region between Velbužd and Prizren was still under Byzantine rule, as indicated in the privilege granted by Alexios III to the Venetians (November 1198).<sup>23</sup> Johannitsa must have occupied it shortly after that. In short, he did not take any actions against the Byzantines in Thrace during the period between 1199 and 1200, because he was busy in the west and northwest. That Niketas Choniates did not mention any of his moves in those directions results directly from the historian's emphasis on the region of the Balkans closer to Constantinople.

The conquest of Braničevo and its hinterland as far as Belgrade restored Bulgarian rule to a region that had been within the First Bulgarian Empire between 818 and 1018. Most prominent in this region were two Roman foundations—Singidunum-Belgrade and Bononia-Vidin—that had been among the first to be rebuilt in the Middle Ages as fortifications controlling a segment of the Danube between its confluence with the Tisza and the Timok rivers. This became a very important region for trade and contacts between the northern and southern banks of the Danube, which explains the fierce compe-

20 PL, vol. 215, 289 (n. v) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 29 (doc. xx) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 579 (no. 17) = FLHB III, 336; Gjuzelev 1977a, 43; Koledarov 1979, 43; Mălinaș 2000, 138; Petkov 2008, 224. Velbužd is part of the present day city of Kyustendil, and Prisdiana cannot be Prishtina, as Mălinaș believes.

21 Iorgulescu 1996, 67; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2007, 36–37; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2008, 37.

22 Erler 1888, 39–40 (FLHB IV, 9–10): "Isti sunt episcopi Bulgariae: Tornoviensis archiepiscopus, qui est primus, archiepiscopus Velesbudiensis, archiepiscopus Prosthlaviensis, Scopiensis, Pizriensis, Budinensis, Lomsiensis, Brunziberensis." See Gjuzelev 1977a, 43. Kuzev 1978, 525–527 has demonstrated that Lomsiensis is not Lom, but Loveč.

23 Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 260–261 (*provincia Vueleusdij, provincia Scopia*); *Regesten*, II, 104–105, nr. 1647; Fine 1994, 26; Dimitrov 1998, 113–114.

tition between various powers for its control, especially of the road along the southern bank of the Danube, and of those along the Morava and the Timok. When the Bulgars first conquered the region between Vidin and Braničevo in 818, the local population, called *Timocians*, fled to Frankish Pannonia. The Bulgars then took also the lands as far as Belgrade (827). The region was the last remnant of Bulgarian independence during the wars between Samuel and Basil II.<sup>24</sup> Johannitsa, who regarded himself as an heir of the emperors Symeon, Peter and Samuel (as clearly indicated by his letters of 1202, 1203 and 1204<sup>25</sup>), claimed therefore the rights to a region occupied by the Byzantines between 1002 (Vidin) and 1018/1019 (Belgrade). The geopolitical situation was in fact similar to that of the early 11th century when the area between Vidin and Belgrade was the bone of contention between Bulgaria, on one hand, and Byzantium allied with Hungary, on the other hand.

Unlike the early 11th century, however, in the late 12th century, the situation was far more complicated. Another actor emerged on the political stage on 1199—Serbia. After 1191, for as long as Stephen Nemanja remained in power, Serbia, albeit allied with Hungary, was within the sphere of Byzantine political influence. That is why the Bulgarian-Hungarian conflict was not only about the area between Vidin and Belgrade, but also about control over Serbia, which was in the way of both powers expanding in the region.<sup>26</sup> To the north, Serbia bordered on the hinterlands of Braničevo and Belgrade, although it did not reach to the bank of the Danube, which was still in Byzantine hands, connecting the great river to the central provinces of the empire via the Morava valley. Serbia took Niš, when Bulgaria attacked the Byzantine Empire in 1199. After Stefan Nemanja's abdication, Raška (the part of Serbia closer to the area between Belgrade and Vidin) was ruled by his youngest son, Stephen II. Stephen was attacked in 1202 by his brother Vukan, who ruled in what is now Montenegro. Vukan wanted to be the sole ruler of Serbia and relied on assistance from the Hungarian king Emeric (1196–1204). He also had the support of Rome, for he had converted to Catholicism in the summer of 1199. A Hungarian army, therefore, entered Serbia in 1202 and imposed Vukan as grand župan, while Emeric included Rascia (Serbia) into the royal title. Johannitsa took advantage of those events, and captured Niš and its hinterland, which had formerly

24 Madgearu 2013b, 125–126.

25 PL, vol. 214, 113 (n. CXV); vol. 215, 287 (n. IV), 290 (n. VI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 2, 26, 30 (doc. II, XVIII, XXI) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 252, 563, 573 (nos. 49, 8, 13) = FLHB III, 310, 334, 338; Wolff 1949, 192, 196; Tăutu 1975, 202, 205; Hintner 1976, 25; Božilov 1985, 47; Tăpkova-Zaimova 1985, 32; Mălinaș 2000, 133–136, 140–141; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 59, 80, 83.

26 Papacostea 1993, 28; Petkov 2008, 221, 223, 225; Pecican 2010, 117–118.

been under Vukan's control. After the peace with Alexios III (an enemy of Hungary as well), Johannitsa gained freedom to turn to the northern territories. He took the side of Stephen II, who had taken refuge in Tärnovo after his brother had become grand župan. A Cuman attack against Serbia, which had been facilitated (if not ordered) by Johannitsa in the fall of 1202,<sup>27</sup> was the pretext King Emeric used to go to war against Johannitsa in the summer of 1203, together with Vukan. The Hungarian king wanted to recover the whole territory that had been conquered by his father, Béla III, in 1183, and then given to Margaret as dowry upon her marriage with Isaac II Angelos. The Hungarian-Serbian troops occupied the area between Belgrade, Braničevo and Niš, and Vukan took the latter city as a reward for his cooperation. However, soon after that, he was ousted by his brother, Stephen II, who returned to Serbia, probably with Johannitsa's military assistance. He had meanwhile married a woman from Johannitsa's court.<sup>28</sup>

The showdown between Emeric and Johannitsa took place somewhere in the valley of the Morava river, south of Braničevo. A later charter of 1231 issued by King Andrew II (1205–1235) refers to the participation of a Hungarian nobleman named Thomas in this campaign “against the Bulgarians above the river Morava.”<sup>29</sup> A Cuman group defeated by the Hungarians was led by a certain Kuban (who appears as *Guban* in one of the pope's letters to Emeric, dated 8 November 1202). Kuban is said to have attacked “with an innumerable army of pagans that part of the lands inhabited by the Christian people, who are subject to your crown” (“cum innumera multitudine paganorum quamdam partem populi christiani, tuae coronae subiecti”). Márta Font had demonstrated

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- 27 The attack is mentioned by pope in one of his letters to Emeric: “Ioannitus terram, quam pater tuus sorori tue imperatrici Grecorum dedit in dotem, detinet occupatam et terram Servie tue corone subiectam, adiuncta sibi paganorum multitudine copiosa, crudeliter devastavit, ita quod, preter eos, qui per eius tirannidem sunt perempti, non pauci christiani sunt in paganorum captivitate deducti.” (PL, vol. 215, 414 (n. CXXVII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 43 (doc. XXXI) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 274 (no. 63) = FLHB III, 352). The pagans in question are the Cumans.
- 28 Jireček 1876, 233; Jireček 1911, 289; Iorga 1937, 115; Hóman 1943, 7–8; Ostrogorsky 1956, 432–433; Zlatarski 1972, III, 149–150; Sweeney 1973, 322; Täutu 1975, 216–226; Hintner 1976, 96–97, 102; Diaconu 1978, 131; Hintner 1983, 159; Dančeva-Vasileva 1986, 102; Schmitt 1989, 30–33; Fine 1994, 41–43, 46–48, 54–55; Kosztolnyik 1996, 10–12; Dimitrov 1998, 111–112, 114; Moore 2003, 74–75; Maksimović 2005, 273–275; Curta 2006, 382; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 41–49; Dall’Aglia 2008–2009, 46; Pecican 2010, 118–122.
- 29 Wenzel, *Codex*, vol. XI (1873), 231 (no. 162): “Hemericus, frater noster, illustris rex Hungariae, Thome comiti in recompensationem fidelium servitorum, que sibi in expeditione quam habuit contra Bulgaros super fluvium Morawa laudabiliter exhibuit.” See Jireček 1911, 289; Zlatarski 1972, III, 150; Font 1988, 264; Dimitrov 1998, 117; Iosipescu 2008, 93.

that Kuban cannot possibly be a corrupt form of *Culinus banus* (Kulin, the ban of Bosnia between 1180 and 1204), as indicated in the Migne edition of Innocent III's correspondence. Kuban was in fact the leader of a Cuman clan, who is again mentioned in a papal letter of 1214, in relation to another conflict (see chapter 7).<sup>30</sup> The pagans are clearly the Cumans, while the "Christian people" are the inhabitants of the lands within Serbia over which Vukan ruled with the assistance of Emeric. By 1202, Johannitsa allied himself with Emperor Alexios III against Emeric and Vukan, while in contact and negotiations with Innocent III, who was himself on the side of Johannitsa's enemies. The pope badly needed the Bulgarian, Hungarian, and Serbian leaders to make peace and work together for the Catholic cause. Innocent III, the most powerful of all medieval popes, believed that as Vicar of Christ he was responsible for the entire humanity, all members of which had to recognize his authority (*plenitudo potestatis*). As a matter of fact, he is considered the most powerful and dynamic pope throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> Such ideas form the basis of the expanding power of the Western Church, either by means of suppressing heresies, or through the crusades. That expansion also targeted Orthodox countries in the Balkans, until then part of the Byzantine Commonwealth. Before Byzantium, Serbia and Bulgaria became targets of Catholic expansionism, which was regarded as a necessary step in the process of liberating the Holy Land. Together with Hungary, one of the most important supporters of papal policies in East Central and Eastern Europe, Serbia and Bulgaria were meant to form strong Catholic front against Byzantium—the ultimate goal of Innocent III's plans for the union of the church.

Hungary, a kingdom regarded as "apostolic" from its inception, played a key role in the pope's political aspirations, the more so that Hungarian kings were interested in the northern Balkans. While Béla III initiated the Hungarian expansion into Southeastern Europe, Emeric introduced the idea of backing that expansion with papal support.<sup>32</sup> The political agenda of Emeric's reign is dominated by the Hungarian expansion to the south, which took the form of the involvement in the Serbian dynastic conflict on the side of Vukan. Innocent III had to take into account those development when attempting to rally the political leaders in the region around the papal banner. In particular, he had to intervene in the conflict between Emeric and Johannitsa, whom the Hungarian king accused of having unjustly occupied the region of between Braničevo and Belgrade. In doing so, Innocent had to walk a very thin line,

30 PL, vol. 214, 1100 (n. CIII); Font 1988, 259–267.

31 Phillips 2004, 3; Gill 1979, 9–10; Moore 2003, 257.

32 Papacostea 1993, 17; Achim 2008, 38–39.

since he also wanted to obtain Johannitsa's submission to papal primacy, much as he had done with Vukan in 1199. That is ultimately the reason for which he kept open the channel of communication with the emperor of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, to whom he reminded him of his and his people's noble Roman origin, an argument that was supposed to convince Johannitsa to convert to Catholicism: "Having heard that the lineage of your ancestors has its origins in the noble city of Rome, and that you have taken from them, as if by hereditary right, both the generosity of the blood and the inclination towards the sincere devotion that you have for the Apostolic See, I have for a long time intended to send you letters and envoys." Elsewhere, the pope speaks directly of Johannitsa's "noble Roman lineage" ("Tam te qui ex nobili Romanorum prosapia diceris descendisse") and the people of his country, who claim to be of "the blood of the Romans" ("populus terre tue, qui de sanguine Romanorum se asserit descendisse").<sup>33</sup> In his letter of 1202, Johannitsa acknowledged the fact that the pope had reminded him of his blood and homeland ("reduxit nos ad memoriam sanguinis et patrie nostre, a qua descendimus").<sup>34</sup>

The idea of Johannitsa's Roman origin was not Innocent III's invention. He had learnt about it from the Johannitsa's envoys, with whom he had come in contact, and who were most likely aware that the tradition of Roman ancestry had been preserved among the Vlachs.<sup>35</sup> The undisputable proof for that is a letter of Basil, the Archbishop of Târnovo, from the summer of 1202. In that letter, Basil explains that "that is why we, old and young, as good sons, ask you as a good father to do as our emperor requires, because he is worthy, since he and his entire empire shows kindness to the Church of Rome, as heirs descending from Roman blood" ("Unde nos parvi et magni, sicut boni filii rogamus vos sicut bonum patrem, ut dominus noster imperator, quod petit a vobis, obtineat, quia dignus est hoc obtinere, quia ipse ac totum imperium eius bonam devotionem ad ecclesiam Romanam habent, tamquam heredes descendentes a san-

33 PL, vol. 214, 825 (n. CCLXVI), 1114, 1115 (n. CXVI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 1 (doc. 1), 3 (doc. III) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 207, 226, 227 (nos. 17, 29) = FLHB III, 308, 312, 314: "Nos autem, audito quod de nobili urbis Rome prosapia progenitores tui originem traxerint, et tu ab eis et sanguinis generositatem contraxeris et sincere devotionis affectum, quem ad apostolicam sedem geris quasi hereditario iure." See Tăutu 1975, 201, 203; Hintner 1976, 55; Armbruster 1993, 33, 35; Pop 1998, 16–17; Mălinaș 2000, 105–106, 112–114; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 39, 59; Pop 2014, 76–77.

34 PL, vol. 214, 1113 (n. CXV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 2 (doc. II) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 563 (no. 8) = FLHB III, 309; Wolff 1949, 192; Iroaie 1967, 94–95; Tăutu 1975, 202; Hintner 1976, 29; Armbruster 1993, 33; Mălinaș 2000, 109; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 52; Petkov 2008, 220.

35 Another source of information must have been the papal legate Dominic, who, as Brătianu 1980, 64 noted, must have known the Vlachs, since he was a Greek.

guine romano”).<sup>36</sup> What Basil demanded from the pope was the recognition of the imperial title, which he thought to be validated by the Roman origin of the Vlachs. Basil’s statement, which most Bulgarian historians ignored, confirms beyond any doubt that Johannitsa’s family was Vlach. An even more important conclusion is that the Vlachs in Bulgaria were aware of their ancient Roman origin.<sup>37</sup> Turning to Rome is the reason for which the title of emperor (tsar) of *the Vlachs* and the Bulgarians was introduced only during Johannitsa’s reign. Until then, only Bulgarians could have an empire, according to the political tradition established prior to the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria. The Byzantines bestowed the title of *basileus* of the Bulgarians onto Peter I (927–969). With the rise of the Second Bulgarian Empire, the new rulers, irrespective of their own ethnic origin, adopted that title.<sup>38</sup> The title of “tsar of the Bulgarians” actually appears on Johannitsa’s only seal found so far, first published in 1932.<sup>39</sup>

The union with the Church of Rome altered the justification for imperial power: the political tradition of the First Empire was now replaced by the people’s ancestry. Thus, the Vlachs became legitimate bearers of authority, along with the Bulgarians. Johannitsa’s first letter to the pope gives his title as *imperator Bulgarorum et Blachorum*, and his polity is called an *imperium*. Archbishop Basil used that same title in his first letter to the pope. In another letter of July 1203, however, Johannitsa refers to himself only as *imperator Bulgarorum*.<sup>40</sup> In his letter of September 8, 1203 in which he placed his church under the authority of Rome he again refers to himself as *imperator totius Bulgariae et Vlachiae*. Similarly, the letter dated to the late 1203 or early 1204 includes the title *imperator omnium Bulgarorum et Blachorum*.<sup>41</sup> Having become a primate of the Roman Church in Bulgaria, Archbishop Basil

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- 36 PL, vol. 215, 1116 (n. CXVII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 5 (doc. IV) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 564 (no. 8) = FLHB III, 314; Prinzing 1972, 29–30; Tăutu 1975, 203; Hintner 1976, 23; Armbruster 1993, 34; Mălinaș 2000, 119–120; Dall’Aglio 2003a, 56; Dall’Aglio 2003b, 82.
- 37 Ignoring Basil’s statement, Brüggemann 2007–2008, 67 believes that “it can almost be taken for granted that the Vlachs of the Balkans had no historical awareness of their Roman descent.” For the problem of the surviving tradition of the Roman origin of the Romanians, see Armbruster 1993.
- 38 Tăpkova-Zaimova 1985, 30; Brezeanu 2001, 75.
- 39 Mušmov 1932; Dujčev 1975, 173–174; Bakalov 1977, 75; Jordanov 2001a, 101–102 (no. 154); Petkov 2008, 217; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 44; Stankov 2015, 362–363.
- 40 PL, vol. 215, 156 (n. CXLII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 11 (doc. X) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 569 (nr. 11) = FLHB III, 319; Tăutu 1975, 204; Mălinaș 2000, 124–125; Petkov 2008, 221.
- 41 PL, vol. 215, col. 287, 290 (n. IV, VI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 26, 30 (doc. XVIII, XXI) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 252, 572 (nr. 49, 13) = FLHB III, 334, 338; Iorga 1937, 114; Tăutu 1975, 206, 208; Hintner 1976, 92; Mălinaș 2000, 133, 142; Petkov 2008, 223, 225.

continued to refer to Johannitsa as *imperator Kaloiohannes dominus omnium Bulgarorum atque Blachorum*.<sup>42</sup> Stelian Brezeanu noted that, judging from the correspondence between Johannitsa and Innocent III, the change from an intitulation involving rule over the people to one involving rule over a territory, which emphasized the unity of two components (*totius Bulgariae et Vlachiae*), took place between September 1203 and November 1204. The main reason for that change was the confrontation with neighboring powers, particularly the dispute with Hungary, as well as with the Latin Empire in Constantinople (see below).<sup>43</sup>

In his letters to Johannitsa and to the Hungarian king Emeric, the pope clearly avoided the intitulation adopted by the ruler of the Second Bulgarian Empire. He preferred to refer to Johannitsa as *dominus Blacorum et Bulgarorum*, or simply *rex Bulgarorum*.<sup>44</sup> Innocent III could not obviously accept the existence of any other emperors besides the Roman ones, either in the east or in the west. Johannitsa did not actually claim universal rule, but only the title of tsar (emperor) of the Bulgarians and the Vlachs. That title could not be translated into Latin with any other word but *imperator*. That is why Johannitsa ended up being recognized by the Pope only as *rex*. Johannitsa was willing to accept the union with the Church of Rome, and in exchange for that he demanded recognition of his imperial title, but also of Archbishop Basil as patriarch. An autocephalous Bulgarian patriarchate has existed between 927 and 971, the period during which the Byzantines had bestowed the imperial title onto Peter I. The Bulgarian patriarchate was later reestablished, when Samuel recreated the empire in Macedonia, with Ohrid as his capital. After 1018, the patriarchate was replaced with the Byzantine archbishopric of Ohrid. The rebirth of the Bulgarian empire also involved the restoration of the Bulgarian patriarchate as a church structure that was different than the autocephalous archbishopric of Ohrid. According to the Byzantine ideology he assumed, Johannitsa could have been anointed emperor only by a patriarch of the church in his own

42 PL, vol. 215, 553 (n. CCXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 49–50 (doc. xxxv) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 578 (no. 16) = FLHB III, 361; Mălinaș 2000, 158–159; Dall’Aglio 2003a, 133; Petkov 2008, 229.

43 Brezeanu 1980, 660–662.

44 PL, vol. 214, 1113, 1117 (n. CXVI, CXIX); PL, vol. 215, 156 (n. CXLII, CXLIII), 277 (n. I), 280 (n. II), 292 (n. VII), 295 (n. XII), 414 (n. CXXVII), 705 (n. CXXIX), 710 (n. CXXXII), 1162 (n. LXV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 3, 6, 11, 13, 17, 20, 32, 38, 43, 54, 55 (doc. III, V, XI, XV, XVI, XXII, XXIII, XXIX, XXXII, XXXVIII, XL) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 226, 229, 241, 249, 253, 257, 266, 274, 314, 331 (nos. 29, 30, 41, 47, 50, 51, 56, 63, 89, 102) = FLHB III, 311, 316, 320, 322, 323, 327, 341, 345, 352, 363, 368, 370; Tăutu 1975, 203, 209; Brezeanu 1980, 660; Djurić 1980, 35; Mălinaș 2000, 112, 128, 143, 145; Gagova 2005, 49–50.



state, and under no circumstances by the Byzantine archbishop of Ohrid, or by a bishop under his jurisdiction.<sup>45</sup> Johannitsa was also wise enough to keep the autocephalous archbishopric of Ohrid independent from Rome in order to preserve a connection with the Byzantine church.<sup>46</sup>

Of the entire correspondence between Rome and Tărnovo, the pope's letter of November 27, 1202 is of great importance, since it shows clearly what Johannitsa claimed. Going through the history of the relation between Bulgaria and the Roman Church, the pope pointed out that the Bulgarians had initially belonged to the Latin rite, only to be later deceived by corrupt Greeks. The letter announced that the pope was about to send of an envoy authorized to establish Archbishop Basil as primate of the Bulgarian church, to handle the structuring of the Bulgarian church according to the norms of the Roman Church, as well as to advise on Johannitsa's demand for a crown. The papal envoy was John of Casamari, who had previously been sent on similar missions to Vukan in Serbia.<sup>47</sup>

In response, Johannitsa sent Archbishop Basil to Rome. A subsequent letter of Basil (November 1203) shows that he left Tărnovo on July 4th, 1203 and reached Dyrrachion 30 days later. However, while there, the Byzantine authorities prevented him from crossing the sea. His message however reached Rome with someone else.<sup>48</sup> That message had been sent by Johannitsa in July 1203 and was now kept in the papal chancery. In his message, Johannitsa thanked Innocent for having sent Chaplain John of Casamari, and informed the pope about his loyalty towards Rome. After the peace with Johannitsa (Spring of 1202), Emperor Alexios III promised his former enemy to give him the imperial crown and that to turn his church into a patriarchate, provided that he renounced his allegiance to Rome. This is very similar to the situation of 927, which was also the result of a peace treaty. However, Johannitsa was determined to accept the pope's primacy and he told Innocent III about Alexios's overtures:

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45 Fedalto 1983, 163.

46 Andreescu 1938, 771–772; Achim 2002, 118–119; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2007, 428.

47 PL, vol. 214, 1116–1117 (n. CXIX) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 3–4 (doc. III) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 228–230 (no. 30) = FLHB III, 315–316; Wolff 1949, 193; Hintner 1976, 44–45, 65–68, 82–84; Fedalto 1983, 163; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 41–42; Armbruster 1993, 33; Mălinaș 2000, 112–114; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 62–64; Dall'Aglia 2003b, 82–83; Curta 2006, 380–381; Stanković 2015, 46.

48 PL, vol. 215, 288 (n. v) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 27 (doc. XIX) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 575 (no. 14) = FLHB III, 336; Wolff 1949, 194; Tăutu 1975, 207; Hintner 1976, 71–72; Mălinaș 2000, 137–139; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 77–79.

As soon as the Greeks found out about it, the patriarch and the emperor sent me a message: “Come on our side, we shall crown you emperor and we shall give you a patriarch, as no empire can last without a patriarch”. But I did not want it; on the contrary, I turned to Your Holiness because I wish to be servant of Saint Peter and Your Holiness.<sup>49</sup>

The pope replied in September 1203 announcing that John is on his way to Tărnovo. He still invited Basil to come to Rome. In the end, he asked Johannitsa to make peace with Vukan: “Make sure that you resume the peace talks with our faithful son, the noble man Wlco” (“cum dilecto filio nobili viro Wlco pacis studeas federa reformare”).<sup>50</sup> The request was timely: Johannitsa had just attacked Vukan’s lands in July. Meanwhile, sometime in August, Chaplain John finally arrived in Tărnovo, while Basil was still in Dyrrachion. Johannitsa recalled Basil in order to receive the insignia as a primate of the Bulgarian church from the papal envoy. This event took place on September 8th, 1203.<sup>51</sup> On that day, Johannitsa issued a chrysobull spelling out his political plan, namely to ask for an imperial crown from the pope, just as the first Bulgarian tsars have done; to obtain the title of patriarchate for the Church of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, forever placed under the authority of Rome; to place all Christian or pagan countries he was about to conquer under the same Roman authority. Chaplain John took a copy of the chrysobull to Rome.<sup>52</sup> The pagan territories Johannitsa was about to conquer could have been only to the north of the river Danube,

49 PL, vol. 215, 156 (n. CXLII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 11 (doc. x) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 570 (no. 11) = FLHB III, 319; “Ex quo sciverunt istud Greci, miserunt michi patriarcha et imperator: Veni ad nos, coronabimus te in imperatorem et faciemus tibi patriarcham, quia imperium sine patriarcha non staret. Sed ego non volui, immo recurri ad sanctitatem tuam, quia volo esse servus sancti Petri et tue sanctitatis.” Wolff 1949, 194; Prinzing 1972, 16–17; Tăutu 1975, 204; Hintner 1976, 92; Lacko 1983, 198; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 43–44; Mălinaș 2000, 39–40, 124–127; Turcuș 2001, 184; Dall’Aglío 2003a, 75; Dall’Aglío 2003b, 84; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2003, 125; Moore 2003, 123; Curta 2006, 381; Petkov 2008, 222.

50 PL, vol. 215, 156–158 (n. CXLIII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 11–13 (doc. XI) = FLHB III, 320–322; Hintner 1976, 74–75, 97, 102; Fine 1994, 48; Mălinaș 2000, 127–128; Moore 2003, 123–124; Dall’Aglío 2003a, 89; Pecican 2010, 117.

51 PL, vol. 215, 289 (n. v) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 27 (doc. XIX) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 575 (no. 14) = FLHB III, 336–337; Wolff 1949, 194–195; Sweeney 1973, 322–323; Tăutu 1975, 207; Mălinaș 2000, 137–139; Dall’Aglío 2003a, 78–79.

52 PL, vol. 215, 287–288 (n. IV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 26–27 (doc. XVIII) = FLHB III, 334–335; Onciul 1968, I, 610; Wolff 1949, 195–196; Prinzing 1972, 28–29; Tăutu 1975, 206; Hintner 1976, 190–194; Gjuzelev 1977a, 42–43; Mălinaș 2000, 133–136; Dall’Aglío 2003a, 83–85; Dall’Aglío 2003b, 85; Petkov 2008, 223–224.

in the Cuman country. There he would have clashed with the political interests of the Hungarians. As for the Christian countries, Johannitsa must have in mind the potential conflict with the Byzantine Empire, which was confronted at that time with the arrival of the Fourth Crusade.

A few months later, either in late 1203, or early 1204, Johannitsa sent a new message to the pope through Bishop Blasius of Braničevo, where he insisted on the recognition of Basil as patriarch. Moreover, he demanded that a cardinal be sent over to grant him the imperial insignia (the crown and the scepter). These were his conditions for the union with Rome. At the end of his letter, Johannitsa explained that Hungary had taken over five bishoprics rightfully belonging to his empire. Unfortunately, they are not named. Four of them must be Braničevo, Niš, Belgrade and Sirmium, while the fifth could be Vidin (which means that the Hungarian army had occupied that city in the summer of 1203). Johannitsa asked Innocent III to mediate the conflict with Hungary:

As for the borders of Hungary, Bulgaria and Vlachia, I leave it to Your Holiness's judgment, I let Your Holiness run it with fairness and justice, so that Your Holiness' soul is without sin; and deliver my Empire justice and his about Bulgaria and Vlachia, just as to the King of Hungary about Hungary, so that the bloodshed of my and his Christians comes to an end.<sup>53</sup>

The conflict in question started in the summer of 1203, when a Hungarian army occupied the Belgrade-Braničevo-Vidin area. In his letter to the pope, Johannitsa distinguished between Bulgaria and Vlachia, which appear as distinct countries, with borders between them, both bordering Hungary. They appear in the same way in one of the pope's letters to Emeric dated September 15th, 1204: *Bulgaria et Blachia*.<sup>54</sup> The Vlachia mentioned there cannot be that

53 PL, vol. 215, 290–291 (n. VI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 30–31 (doc. XXI) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 572–574 (no. 13) = FLHB III, 338–340: “Et de confinio Hungarie, Bulgarie et Blachie relinquo iudicio sanctitatis tue, ut dirigas negocium istud recte et iuste, ut non habeat peccatum anima sanctitatis tue, et ita habeat imperium meum iusticias Bulgarie et Blachie, quod Rex Hungarie habeat iusticias Hungarie, et cessent occisiones Christianorum in me et ipsum. Sciat autem sanctitas tua, quoniam v. episcopatus Bulgarie pertinent ad imperium meum, quos invasit et detinet Rex Hungarie cum iusticiis ecclesiarum, et episcopatus ipsi sunt annihilati: et si iustum est, hoc fiat.” See Onciul 1968, I, 404–405, 604; II, 48–49; Wolff 1949, 196; Tăutu 1975, 205; Hintner 1976, 81, 89–97; Schmitt 1989, 33; Iorgulescu 1995, 155; Mălinaș 2000, 140–141; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 82; Petkov 2008, 225–226.

54 PL, vol. 215, 411 (n. CXXVI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 40 (doc. XXXI) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 272 (no. 62) = FLHB III, 348; Tăutu 1975, 222; Hintner 1976, 73; Iorgulescu 1995, 153; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 119–120.

about which Robert de Clari and Geoffroy de Villehardouin wrote, namely the Vlachia north of the Stara Planina (see Chapter 4). In this case, the name Vlachia applies to another territory, which bordered Hungary and must have been located in or next to the disputed area, i.e., somewhere between Vidin and Braničevo. That is the reason for which the Hungarian king refused to recognize Johannitsa as king of Vlachia, in addition to his title of king of Bulgaria.<sup>55</sup> The territory squeezed between Hungary and Vlachia also included the “Craina” to the northwest of present-day Mehadia. The name Craina derives from the Bulgarian word *krai*, meaning, “margin.”<sup>56</sup> The polygonal fortification built by Bulgarians in Severin over the ruins of the old Roman city of Drobeta (see below, last chapter), is dated to the period of Bulgarian expanding domination into the valley of the Cerna River. Various historians, beginning with Dimitre Onciul, have accepted that the Second Bulgarian Empire ruled over territories north of the river Danube.<sup>57</sup>

The occupation of that territory north of the Danube must have taken place in 1199 when Johannitsa conquered Vlachia between Vidin and Belgrade. However, nothing indicates that his rule extended into Oltenia and Wallachia, as both regions were under Cuman rule. Even less credible is Petăr Koledarov’s suggestion that as early as 1185 the Second Bulgarian Empire also included Moldavia all the way up to the southern border of the Rus’ principality of Halych.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Vlachia mentioned in the correspondence between Johannitsa and Innocent III was a much smaller area in the region of Vidin-Braničevo—the same region in which Vlachs had harassed the participants in the Third Crusade. Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca favored a similar interpretation, but without any arguments.<sup>59</sup> The Vlachia between Vidin and Braničevo must have also included the *craina* north of the Danube. To Emeric, that was a territory within the Hungarian borders, since those were the lands that had made up Margaret’s dowry. The name of *Vlachia* implied a higher density of Vlach population, which is not surprising considering that Timok Valley, as proven by linguistic research, was one of the places where the Daco-Romanian dialect speakers survived. The other were the Apuseni Mountains and the

55 As noted first by Onciul 1968, II, 50–51.

56 Achim 2006, 36; Achim 2008, 83. According to Pecican 2009, 266–268, the inception of that *Craina* could be as well dated to the period of the expansion of the first Bulgarian state, after 827.

57 Onciul 1968, I, 404–409, 455, 604–606; II, 48–49; Ștefănescu 1965, 226; Tăutu 1975, 238–239; Ciobanu 1985, 162; Mălinaș 2000, 14. However, other historians have denied the expansion of the Second Bulgarian Empire into the lands north of the Danube (Jireček 1876, 377; Xenopol 1891, 277–278; Brezeanu 1980, 667–673; Fine 1994, 55; Tanașoca 2001, 118).

58 Koledarov 1979, 38–41, 48 (with the two maps).

59 Tanașoca 1981, 590.

Danube Valley, between Teleorman and Cernavoda (on both banks of the river).<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, the territory given to Margaret as dowry extended on both sides of the river Danube, and in the north in the mountain region of the Banat, north of Kuvin. On March 30, 1223, Pope Honorius III issued a document granting protection to the widowed princess, and listing her properties. Among them, besides *castrum Keve*, there was the royal domain of *Elyad*, present-day Ilidia (a manor with a rotunda-shaped chapel was discovered by archaeologists there).<sup>61</sup>

After receiving Johannitsa's message in late 1203, the pope decided on February 25, 1204, to send Cardinal Leo Brancaloni to Târnovo with messages for Johannitsa and Basil. The cardinal was also to the dispute between Hungary and Bulgaria. Johannitsa was informed that he would receive the royal, not imperial crown and scepter ("sceptrum tibi regale tribuat et imponat regium diadema"). He was granted the right to mint coins with his image ("publicam in regno tuo cudendi monetam tuo caractere insignitam liberam tibi concedimus facultatem"), as he had previously requested.<sup>62</sup> Basil was acknowledged as primate, not patriarch ("totius Bulgarie ac Blachie primate").<sup>63</sup> Before crossing into Bulgaria, Cardinal Leo was stopped at Keve (Kuvin)<sup>64</sup> by royal orders, and demanded to ask Johannitsa for a meeting with Emeric on an island, in order to re-establish peace. The cardinal refused, as he had not been authorized to do any such thing. He was therefore arrested and released only upon special request from the pope. He crossed into Bulgaria in early October.<sup>65</sup> The events clearly show Emeric's frustration with the pope's recognition of Johannitsa

60 Reichenkron 1963, pp. 75–77; Zbucea 2000, 41–45.

61 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 81 (doc. LIX); Tăutu 1956, 62–64; Tăutu 1975, 227, 230–232; Iambor 1980, 171; Iorgulescu 1995, 149–150. According to the most recent studies, the rotunda could not be dated before the 13th century (Teicu 2013, 440–447).

62 Johannitsa does not seem to have used that right, irrespective of the continuation of the striking of Bulgarian imitations of Byzantine coins, which continued through his reign, as well as those of Boril and John Asan II (Iliescu 1989, 110; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 115, 118–119).

63 PL, vol. 215, 277–287, 292–294 (n. I–III, VIII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 17–25, 32–33 (doc. XV–XVII, XXIII) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 249–256 (nos. 47–50) = FLHB III, 323–334, 341–342; Wolff 1949, 196–197; Tăutu 1975, 200; Hintner 1976, 83, 84; Fedalto 1983, 163–164; Božilov 1985, 49; Tăpkova-Zaimova 1985, 35; Iliescu 1989, 110; Mălinaș 2000, 143–145; Brezeanu 2001, 75; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 109–110; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 85; Moore 2003, 127; Curta 2006, 383.

64 Keve is not at person name, as believed Kosztolnyik 1996, 13.

65 PL, vol. 215, 411, 413–417, 427 (n. CXXVI, CXXVII, CXXXVII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 40–47 (doc. XXXI–XXXIII) = FLHB III, 348–358; Jireček 1876, 237; Wolff 1949, 197–198; Sweeney 1973, 329–330; Tăutu 1975, 215–226; Hintner 1976, 98, 125–126; Brătianu 1980, 78–79; Kosztolnyik 1996, 13–14; Mălinaș 2000, 146–152; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 120–132.

as king. His insolent references to Margaret's old dowry<sup>66</sup> received a stern response from Innocent, who told Emeric that he had recognized Johannitsa's legitimate rule over the territory disputed with Hungary:

Two brothers, namely Peter and Ioannitius, descending from the ancestry of the old kings, began not just occupying but also recovering their parents' land, and thus won miraculously victory over great princes and numerous people. We cannot deny that they may have invaded a territory in a violent manner, but we can strongly assert that they conquered most of the territory by virtue of their paternal rights. For this reason, following our predecessors' example, we understand to crown him king not of a foreign country, but of his own country, wishing to be returned the unlawfully possessed territory, and also to be returned the unlawfully taken territory, for he himself asks us to deliver justice between you and him over the invaded territories.<sup>67</sup>

That the cardinal was stopped at Kuvín implies that the Danube was once again the frontier between Hungary and the Bulgarian province on the opposite bank ("Keve, ubi solo Danubio mediante regnum Ungarie a Bulgarorum provincia separator"). This in turn suggests that Johannitsa, sometime in the summer of 1204, was again ruling over the region between Vidin and Belgrade. However, no direct information exists and it is impossible to date that conquest with any precision.<sup>68</sup> At any rate, Pope Innocent III believed that the region was rightfully Johannitsa's. In exchange, Johannitsa most likely had to give up an area north of the Danube, possibly Craina.

66 Kosztolnyik 1996, 7–8, 13, 30–32 suggests that Emeric was mentally deranged, possibly suffering from paranoia.

67 PL, vol. 215, 414 (n. CXXVII) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 44 (doc. XXXII) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 274 (no. 63) = FLHB III, 353: "Duo fratres, Petrus videlicet et Ioannitius, de priorum regum prosapia descendentes, terram patrum suorum non tam occupare, quam recuperare ceperunt, ita quod una die de magnis principibus et innumeris populis mirabilem sunt victoriam consecuti. Non ergo negamus, quin forsan aliquam partem terre violenter invaserint, sed constanter asserimus, quod plurimam terre partem de iure recuperavere paterno. Unde nos eum non super alienam terram, sed super propriam ad instar predecessorum nostrorum regem intendimus coronare, volentes ut et ipse terram restituat iniuste detentam, et terra iniuste detenta, restituatur eidem, cum ipse postulaverit hoc a nobis, ut de terris invasis faciamus inter te et ipsum utrique parti iustitiam exhiberi." Sweeney 1973, 323–328; Tăutu 1975, 218–219; Hintner 1976, 158–159; Brătianu 1980, 79; Fine 1994, 55; Mălinaș 2000, 147–152; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 126; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 92.

68 Iorgulescu 1996, 67 wrongly assumed that Kuvín was in Bulgaria.

The cardinal reached Tărnovo on October 15, 1204. On November 7, he consecrated Basil as primate of the Church of the Bulgarians and the Vlachs, now united with Rome, and on the next day (November 8) the coronation of Johannitsa as king of Bulgaria and Vlachia took place most likely in the Church of Saint Demeter. In his letter of November 1204 to the pope, Johannitsa accepted the title of *rex totius Bulgarie et Vlachie*, but he continued to refer to his country as *imperium*. Moreover, he again accused the Hungarian king of aggression:

I am also writing to you about the Hungarian, that my empire has no province or any common affair with him, and I do no harm to him, on the contrary, but he despises me and harms my imperial provinces. (...) And Your Holiness should write to him to stay away from my empire, for my empire neither despises, nor has any intention of going against his countries; but if he comes against my empire's countries and the Lord helps me defeat him, Your Holiness should not blame my empire, but I should be free from sin.<sup>69</sup>

In his turn, Basil sent a thank-you letter to the pope, in which he called Johannitsa *imperator Caloiohannes dominus omnium Bulgarorum atque Blachorum*.<sup>70</sup>

Basil's consecration as archbishop was depicted on a mural painting in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Melnik, showing Saint Peter consecrating a bishop. In that same church, Saint Basil the Great is portrayed in a preeminent position in relation to other saints, such as John Chrysostomos, Gregory and

69 PL, vol. 215, 551–553 (n. CCXXX, CCXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 48–50 (doc. XXXIV–XXXV) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 576–577 (no. 15) = FLHB III, 359–361: “Scribo autem vobis et de Ungaro, quoniam imperium meum non habet aliquam societatem regionum vel aliquam rem cum eo, neque ei nocet, immo ipse parvipendit et nocet regionibus imperii mei. (...) Et scribat ei sanctitas vestra, quatinus distet a regno meo, quoniam imperium meum nec eum habet parvipendere, nec contra terras eius abire. Si vero ipse venerit contra terras imperii mei, et Deus adiuverit, ut vincatur, non habeat sanctitas vestra imperium meum suspectum, sed sim liber.” Wolff 1949, 197–198; Sweeney 1973, 332; Tăutu 1975, 208; Hintner 1976, 207; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 47–48; Schmitt 1989, 34–35; Papacostea 1993, 29; Fine 1994, 56; Mălinaș 2000, 146–152, 155–158; Turcuș 2001, 184–185; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 133–135; Dall’Aglia 2003b, 93; Petkov 2008, 227–229.

70 PL, vol. 215, 553–554 (n. CCXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 49–50 (doc. XXXV) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 578 (no. 16) = FLHB III, 360–361; Mălinaș 2000, 158–159; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 133; Petkov 2008, 229–230.

Athanasios. The iconography symbolized the consecration of the Archbishop of Bulgaria and Vlachia by the pope's envoy, Cardinal Leo.<sup>71</sup>

Before the news regarding the coronation reached in Rome, on October 29th, 1204 the pope wrote to several German hierarchs that “those who showed no or little respect and obedience to us and the apostolic chair before, Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Armenians, through the grace of God, they have now fully returned to obedience to us and to devotion to the Apostolic See” (“Cum ii qui olim nullam vel modicam nobis et apostolicae sedi reverentiam et obedientiam exhibebant, Graeci videlicet, Blachi, Bulgari et Armenii, nunc ad obedientiam nostram et devotionem apostolicae sedis plene per Dei gratiam revertantur”).<sup>72</sup>

Thus the negotiations between Johannitsa and Innocent III resulted in the recognition of his state not as an empire, but as a kingdom—a member of the family of the Christian kings under the pope's authority, on an equal footing with Hungary. From the Church's point of view, the primate of the Bulgarian and Vlach Church was like a patriarch, although simply called archbishop. In that capacity, he could crown the king. Moreover, the Bulgarian Church had the right to elect its own primate.<sup>73</sup>

Before the rebellion of 1185, there was no bishopric in Tărnovo, and it is not clearly known to which diocese that settlement actually belonged, before becoming the capital of the new empire. The information in the Byzantine sources is contradictory. According to George Akropolites the town was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate in Constantinople, but Tărnovo most likely was part of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, as mentioned by Nikephoros Gregoras. That much results from Demetrios Chomatenos's opinion of 1216, according to which Tărnovo rightfully belonged to the archbishopric of Ohrid. When Tărnovo became an archbishopric, eight bishoprics taken over from the archbishopric of Ohrid were attached to it, in order to emphasize the dominating position of the Second Empire's church in the context of the disappearance of the imperial Byzantine power in Macedonia and Albania. Moreover, the expansion following the 1230 victory at Klokotnitsa (see Chapter 8) brought other bishoprics under the authority of the Archbishop of Tărnovo.<sup>74</sup>

71 Todić 2008.

72 PL, vol. 216, 1116 (*Registrum domini Innocentii III super negotio Romani Imperii*, nr. CXIII) = *Regestum Innocentii*, 280.

73 For these problems pertaining to canon law, see Tăutu 1964, 457–462.

74 Akropolites, c. 33 (ed. Heisenberg, 50; transl. Macrides, 194); Demetrios Chomatenos, 229\*–230\*, 378 (nr. 114); Nikephor Gregoras, II, 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 77; FGHB XI, 125–126); Tăpkova-Zaimova 2007, 424–425; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2008, 36–37.



While Johannitsa was turning into a sovereign acknowledged by the pope, Byzantium was experiencing dramatic events that were ultimately the consequence of Innocent III's expansionist policies. During the last two decades of the 12th century, the Byzantine empire could no longer serve the military and commercial interests of the Western people in Levant since it did not possess anymore a fleet and had stopped participating in the war against Islam. On the contrary, Andronikos and Isaac II supported Saladin, the greatest enemy of Christianity, and sparked disputes between the Italian maritime republics of Genoa and Venice. The Venetians had been banished from Constantinople in 1171, and the reparation act issued by Isaac II in 1185 was not sufficient, given that that only some of their properties had been returned. On the other hand, Isaac II signed agreements with the rival republics of Genoa and Pisa in 1192. Those Italian city-states competed with Venice for commercial hegemony on the seas under Byzantine control. Eventually, in 1198, Alexios III was forced grant privileges to Venice as well, since the Venetians threatened to give assistance to Alexios, the son of Isaac II, who had escaped Constantinople and had joined his sister, Irene, the wife of Philip of Swabia.<sup>75</sup>

Under those circumstances, Innocent III called for a new crusade in August 1198. Its objective was the conquest of Egypt, the center of Saladin's power, and a starting point for an offensive against the Holy Land. The preparations for the crusade took longer than usual because most western rulers had no intentions to participate. In fact preparations began only in the spring of 1201 under the leadership of the Italian marquis Boniface of Montferrat, Philip of Swabia's cousin. In order to reach Egypt, the crusaders needed a sufficiently large fleet, to be supplied by the Italian republics. Among them, only Venice was willing to deliver, and agreed to carry 33,500 men (4,500 knights with their horses, 9,000 squires, and 20,000 footmen). Although those were smaller numbers than for the previous crusade, it was not possible to meet them. Only some 13,000 crusaders gathered in Venice in October 1202, and the fleet previously prepared was too large, while the Venetians could no longer recover their expenditures. The crusaders have promised to pay 85,000 silver marks (approximately 212 kg, twice the yearly income of the French king) for all of the 450 transports performed with 50 galleys. As only 51,000 were paid, the Venetians needed a compensation. This situation determined the gradual changing of the crusade's objective. First, Doge Enrico Dandolo (1192–1205) forced the crusaders to conquer the port of Zara on the eastern Adriatic coast (November 24, 1202). Venice wanted the town, which was under Hungarian rule since 1182. Dandolo then

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75 Nicol 1966, 275–276; Carile 1978, 52–55; Angold 1984, 289–290; Nicol 2001, 141–166; Magdalino 2008, 651; Van Tricht 2011, 19.

connived to redirect the crusade route to Constantinople instead of Egypt, since it was in the interest of the Venitians to establish a complete control over the empire. The privileges granted in 1198 were only the beginning of the Venetians commercial and military expansion.<sup>76</sup>

The political aspirations of Alexios, the son of Isaac II, offered a good opportunity to the Venetians to fulfill their own plans. Supported by Boniface, his relative, Alexios promised that, should the crusaders restore him his father to power in Constantinople, they would both pay the crusaders' debt to Venice, in addition to huge amounts to all the crusaders. Moreover, Alexios promised to put the Byzantine church under papal authority. The crusade fleet reached Constantinople in late June 1203. Once the ships entered the Golden Horn, the crusaders succeeded in breaking through the wall protecting the city on that side. The Emperor Alexios III fled from Constantinople on July 17, 1203, and he was replaced by Isaac II, now back from prison. He ruled together with his son, Alexios IV, their reign beginning on August 1. Alexios IV paid only half of the promised amount, which led to a quick deterioration of his relations with the crusaders. On the other hand, the population of the capital became increasingly hostile to the presence of Westerners people in Galata, beyond the Golden Horn, especially after a terrible fire ravaged the city on August 19, 1203. An usurper named Alexios Murtzuphlos ("Bushy-Browed") removed Isaac II and Alexios IV from power on February 5, 1204. He began to rule as Alexios V Dukas and proved to be a capable leader who enjoyed the support of the population. However, he was also unable to pay the crusaders the remaining debt in the amount of 360,000 *hyperpera*. Without that money, the crusaders could not continue their expedition, as they could no longer use the Venetian fleet to go to Egypt. Roman-Catholic priests among the crusaders advised them to attack the "schismatic" Byzantines instead, thus changing the crusade objective once again. The decision was taken to conquer Constantinople, and the city fell to the crusaders on April 13, 1204.<sup>77</sup>

Before presenting the terrible consequences that this event had for the history of Europe (as it deepened the division between East and West that had begun with the schism of 1054), let us return to the beginning of Isaac II and

76 Longnon 1949, 19–34; Ostrogorsky 1956, 436–439; Nicol 1966, 276–281; Carile 1978, 75–122; Gill 1979, 11–23; Angold 1984, 291–293; Runciman 1995, 107–115; Kosztolnyik 1996, 25–26; Nicol 2001, 167–180; Phillips 2004, 5–7, 58–126; Tyerman 2006, 502–533; Van Tricht 2011, 19–20.

77 Longnon 1949, 31, 33, 35–48; Ostrogorsky 1956, 435, 439–440; Vasiliev 1958, 453–461; Nicol 1966, 281–286; Carile 1978, 67, 115–116, 127–173; Runciman 1995, 115–123; Nicol 2001, 167–170, 181–197; Phillips 2004, 127–280; Tyerman 2006, 538–554; Van Tricht 2011, 20–24.

Alexios IV's unfortunate reign. In August 1203, Alexios IV, together with the most important leaders of the crusade, began to bring the provinces of the empire under his authority. As Geoffroy de Villehardouin noted, the lands on both sides of the Straits surrendered to him, with one exception: Johannitsa's country. About this "king of Vlachia and Bulgaria", Villehardouin knew that

he was a Vlach having rebelled against his father and uncle (i.e. Isaac II and Alexios III) and had fought them for twenty years and he had acquired so much land from them as he became a strong king. And learn that on the other side of Saint George Channel, to the west, he almost got took half from him. He did not obey to him and did not follow his will.<sup>78</sup>

It appears that Alexios IV did not realize that Johannitsa was the ruler of an independent state, which had been recognized as such through the peace concluded with the previous emperor, whom he had now replaced. Isaac II, who knew the man very well, had connections with Johannitsa, about the nature of which practically nothing is known. That he got in touch with Johannitsa is however demonstrated by the discovery of his seal, dated during the second reign of 1203–1204, in Tărnovo, around the city on the Tsarevets.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps in his letter Isaac II warned Johannitsa to stay away from Alexios III, who at that time, was in Thrace looking for the support of Johannitsa, with whom he had concluded an alliance not long before being overthrown and exiled from Constantinople. Together with a group of loyal supporters, Alexios III first took refuge at Develtos, on the Bulgarian border, and then at Mosynopolis, an important fortification on *Via Egnatia* (a location no longer existing 5 km west of Komotini). Alexios III proclaimed himself again emperor in Thrace in the fall of 1203.<sup>80</sup>

However, Johannitsa was determined to take advantage of the situation in Constantinople. In February or March 1204, he sent an envoy to the crusaders, to let them know that:

if they wanted to crown him king in order to be the master of his land, Vlachia, he would understand that he received his land and kingdom

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78 Geoffroy, c. 202 (ed. Faral, I, 206–207; transl. Fluieraru, 97); Primov 1975, 56; Carile 1978, 137; Gagova 1986b, 198; Dall'Aglia 2003b, 86–87. Villehardouin mistook Johannitsa for his elder brother, who had started the rebellion. The Saint George branch is the Dardanelles Strait.

79 Jordanov 2009, 105 (nr. 199).

80 Longnon 1949, 58; Prinzing 1972, 4–6; Asdracha 1976, 105; Carile 1978, 138; Soustal 1991, 103, 369.

from them, and he would come to help them take over Constantinople, together with a hundred thousand soldiers. (...) When the barons in the army learned about John the Vlach's message, they said they would think about it; and after thinking about it, they took a wrong decision when they answered they could not care less about him or his help (...). And after he failed in his endeavor, he then asked Rome for the crown, and the pope sent him a cardinal to crown him. And that is how he was crowned king.<sup>81</sup>

It is likely that Johannitsa had in mind a division of Thrace between him and the crusaders, within an alliance that would have smoothed his rapprochement with Rome, and would pleased the pope.<sup>82</sup>

The leaders of the crusade were not capable of understanding the advantages of that alliance, largely because they scorned Johannitsa. According to Niketas Choniates, they insulted him and even threatened to attack him, because he had unjustly taken land from the emperor:

He received them gladly, for he looked askance at the Latins' arrogant bearing and with distrust regarded their lance as a flaming sword, for when he had dispatched envoys on a mission of friendship, he had been instructed to address the Latins in his letters, not as an emperor greets his friends, but as a servant his masters, in this way being demoted to his former station. Otherwise they would bear arms against him and ravage Mysia, denying him its fruits, since he had rebelled against his Roman lords.<sup>83</sup>

This passage from Choniates' *History* and Robert de Clari's account of the beginning of the rebellion of 1185 (see Chapter 4),<sup>84</sup> suggest that the Latins adopted from the Byzantines the idea that Peter and Asan had illegally occupied imperial territory that was now to return to the the rightful owner. It was

81 Robert de Clari, c. 64, 65 (ed. Lauer, 63–65; transl. Fluieraru, 119–122); Wolff 1949, 201–202; Hansen-Löwe 1971, 106; Primov 1975, 54; Božilov 1985, 49; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 87–89; Van Tricht 2011, 388.

82 Primov 1975, 55–56; Fine 1994, 81.

83 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 9 (ed. Van Dieten, 612–613; transl. Magoulias, 335–336; FHDR III, 312/313); Primov 1975, 55; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 52; Pecican 2010, 75–77.

84 Robert de Clari, c. 64 (ed. Lauer, 63; transl. Fluieraru, 119–120).

precisely for that reason that Johannitsa could not become a vassal of any crusader: he was, after all, only a rebel.<sup>85</sup>

If Johannitsa truly wanted to become the vassal of any crusader, he probably thought of Boniface of Montferrat, who could recognize his royal title. Johannitsa was at that time in conflict with the Hungarian king. His envoy came to the crusaders shortly after Johannitsa had written to the pope, whom he had asked to mediate the conflict with Hungary. At that point, Johannitsa was not sure that he could obtain the promised crown from the pope, whose legate, Cardinal Leo Brancaloni was still captive in Hungary.<sup>86</sup> In addition to allowing him to participate in the conquest of Constantinople, his offer to the crusaders had the advantage of providing a deterrent for the Hungarian king, should an alliance between the crusaders and Johannitsa become reality. King Emeric was still angry that the crusaders had taken the port of Zara from him. A considerable part of the 100,000 warriors Johannitsa is said to have promised (even if the number was exaggerated) must have been Cumans. It is not an accident that Robert de Clari mentioned their worth as allies for the Vlachs within his story about Johannitsa's envoy to the crusaders. Rejected and offended, Johannitsa soon turned into the crusaders' worst enemy.

Nevertheless, Johannitsa continued to believe that he had much in common with the crusaders. According to Robert de Clari, he invited Pierre de Bracheux, one of the most famous French noblemen participating in the Fourth Crusade, to visit his camp somewhere in Thrace. During the conversation, he asked him about the reason the crusaders had come to seize his land. Pierre de Bracheux answered by pointing to the fact that they, the French, had come to take back Troy, their ancestors' homeland. The exact date of that meeting is not known, but Benjamin Hendrickx believed that it must have taken place before to the conquest of Constantinople.<sup>87</sup>

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85 Dall'Aglio 2003b, 89; Curta 2016, 453.

86 Mărculeț 2008, 43 denies that Johannitsa had requested acknowledgement from the crusaders, as he is convinced that that recognition had already been obtained from the pope. His interpretation is contradicted by facts.

87 Robert de Clari, c. 106 (ed. Lauer, 102; transl. Fluieraru, 164); Iroaie 1967, 96–98; Hendrickx 1970, 159–160; Primov 1975, 54; Brătianu 1980, 76–77; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 54; Kaymakamova 2010, 223. A date after April 1205 was advanced by Dall'Aglio 2003b, 99–100 and Pecican 2010, 81–85, 94–109; however, it cannot be accepted. For the medieval legend of the Trojan origin of the Franks, which is already attested in the 7th century, see Ewig 1997. Shawcross 2003, 135–136, followed by Curta 2016, 432, 456, 459 considers that the episode was inserted after 1216 by Robert de Clari during a revision of his work. Even so, a date before the conquest of Constantinople makes more sense than the period between mid-1205 and Fall of 1207, as proposed by Shawcross. Robert provided detailed

The empire's capital city fell into the hands of the crusaders without the involvement of Johannitsa's army. The conquest was made possible by a penetration of the seaside wall of the Golden Horn. The crusader forces participating in the final attack have been estimated at about 20,000 people.<sup>88</sup> After Alexios V fled (April 13th, 1204), the city was systematically sacked, to an extent that was not surpassed even by the Ottoman sack of May 29th, 1453. Soon after that, the empire was divided between participants according to the *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae*. Although their supreme leader was Boniface of Montferrat, Baldwin, count of Flanders (or of Hainaut), was elected emperor on May 9th, 1204 (he was crowned a week later). He was the commander of the strongest corps, the Flemish contingent. Boniface, however, gained one of the most important parts of the former Byzantine Empire, a kingdom with its capital in Thessaloniki. He married Margaret, Isaac II's widow, thus becoming, at least in theory, the ally of the Hungarian kings Emeric and Andrew II, who were her brothers. He therefore laid claims to Margaret's dowry, the territory disputed by Hungary and Bulgaria. It is quite possible that Emeric's insistence that the pope restored that territory to him had much to do with his plan to gain Boniface's alliance against Johannitsa.<sup>89</sup>

The Kingdom of Thessaloniki became the launchpad for attacks on other Greek regions, up to the Peloponnese, where the Despotate of Morea was created, led by Geoffroy de Villehardouin's namesake and nephew. The region to the north-east from the Kingdom of Thessaloniki was divided between Venice and several Western noblemen, who took over the existing fortifications. Southeastern Thrace, up to Agathopolis, went to Baldwin. From the former Byzantine Empire, the Greeks only maintained dominion over some areas of Asia Minor—the empires of Nicaea and Trebizond—and in western Balkans—the Despotate of Epirus (see Figure 3).<sup>90</sup> Over the next few decades, relations between Bulgaria and those peripheral, successor states varied between alliance and hostility. Bulgaria may also be regarded as a successor state. However, the alliance between Bulgaria's southern and northern neighbors was a serious

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descriptions only for the period when he was among the crusaders, that is until April 1205. Likewise untenable is the opinion of Markov 2008, 23–25, according to whom the episode is an interpolation of the scribe (not of Robert de Clari).

88 Hendrickx 1971, 32–35; Koliaš 2005, 128.

89 Longnon 1949, 49–59; Ostrogorsky 1956, 444–449; Täutu 1956, 54; Vasiliev 1958, 462–464; Nicol 1966, 286–289; Wolff 1969, 187–192; Prinzing 1972, 34; Carile 1978, 175–199; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 49–51; Schmitt 1989, 37–38; Papacostea 1993, 29; Fine 1994, 62–63; Runciman 1995, 125–127; Van Tricht 2011, 389.

90 Longnon 1949, 61–62; Nicol 1957, 7–11; Nicol 1966, 289; Carile 1978, 202; Gagova 1986b, 198; Soustal 1991, 102, 169; Külzer 2008, 141.

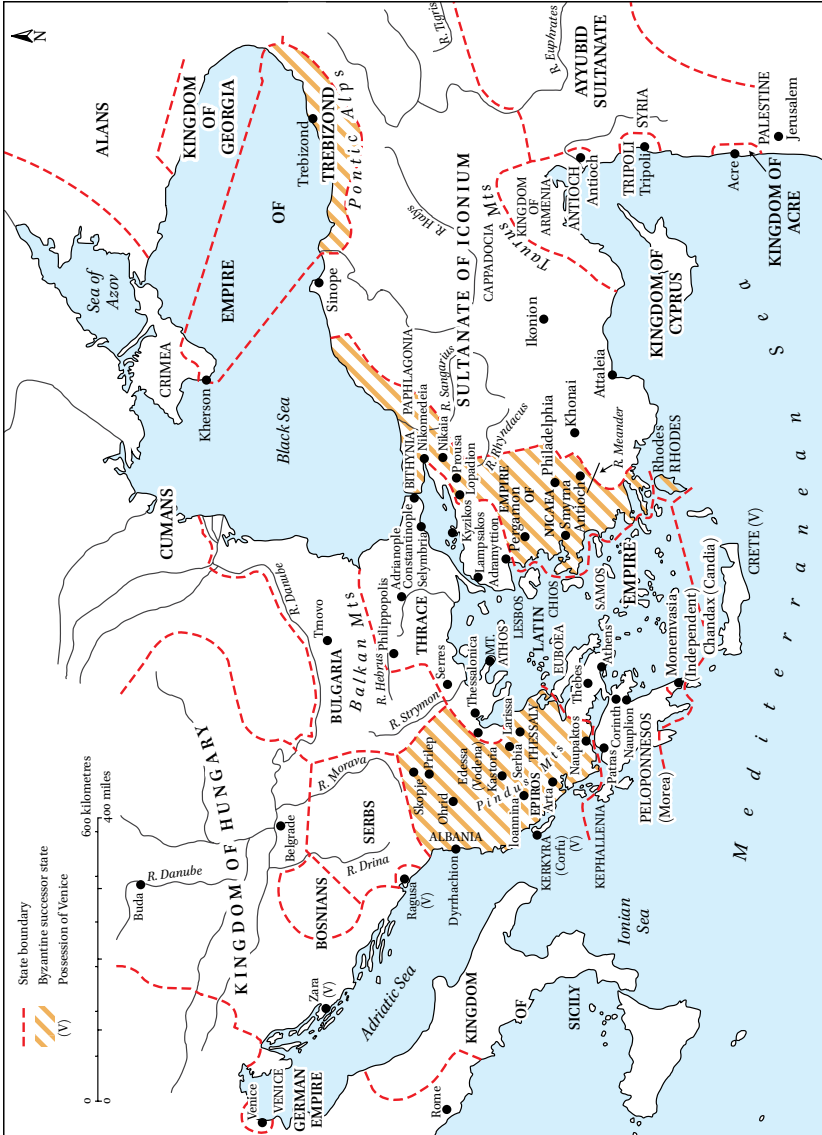


FIGURE 3 The states that emerged after the Fourth Crusade (after J. Haldon, *The Palgrave Atlas of Byzantine History*, New York, 2005, 119, Map 9.3).

threat for Johannitsa. After the pope recognized his as King of Bulgaria and Vlachia, in his letter of response, he wrote:

about the Latins who entered Constantinople, so that you would write to them to tell them to stay away from my kingdom and not show contempt for us, so that my kingdom does not harm them. If they were to start something against my kingdom, treat us with contempt or murder somebody, I urge your Holiness not to suspect my kingdom and release me from sin.<sup>91</sup>

Johannitsa initially tried to keep the peace with Emperor Baldwin I of Constantinople, but later used the supporters of his former ally, Emperor Alexios III, to defend the territory he held in Thrace. That province had once again become an object of interest for, who took advantage of the dissensions among its inhabitants. Philippopolis, the most important city in Thrace, was the target of Johannitsa's policy. Some of the city's inhabitants were on his side, others favored the Latins, as they feared the Bulgarian occupation. Despite the resistance led by general Alexios Aspietes (the former commander of Serres), Johannitsa eventually took the city at a date not precisely known. It is however known that the subsequent occupation by the crusader leader Renier of Trit took place in November 1204 (its inhabitants submitted to him in order to gain protection from "Johannitsa, king of Vlachia"). Philippopolis was once again in Johannitsa's hands in June 1205.<sup>92</sup>

Thrace was a region now disputed between three political actors—Bulgaria, the Latins, and the local Byzantine forces. According to Niketas Choniates, after Alexios III asked Boniface of Montferrat for asylum in early 1205, his sup-

91 PL, vol. 215, 552–553 (n. CCXXX) = Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1887, 48 (doc. xxxiv = *Acta Innocentii III*, 577 (no. 15) = FLHB III, 360: "De Latinis quoque, qui Constantinopolim introierunt, scribo sanctitati vestre, ut eis scribatis, quatinus distent ad imperio meo et sic imperium meum nullum malum eis facit, neque ipsi nobis parvipendant. Si forte ipsi conati fuerint contra imperium meum et pavipenderint eum et occidetur ex eis, non habeat sanctitas vestra imperium meum suspectum, sed sint universa libera." See Iorga 1937, 114–115; Wolff 1949, 198; Wolff 1969, 201–202; Hintner 1976, 207; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 134–135; Petkov 2008, 228.

92 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 13 (ed. Van Dieten, 627; transl. Magoulias, 343–344; FHDR III, 322/323–324/325); Geoffroy, c. 311, 345, 346 (ed. Faral, II, 120–121, 154–157; transl. Fluieraru, 140, 149–150); Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 662 (ed. Markov, 60/61): *Johennis de Blaquie et de Bougherie les apressoit mout*; Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 21; transl. Macrides, 139; FHDR III, 400/401); Longnon 1949, 68; Wolff 1952, 290; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 57; Gagova 1986b, 198.



porters in Thrace, all able military men, pledged themselves to Johannitsa. *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae* mentions that Alexios III “fled with 5000 men to John, king of Wallachia” (“cum quinque millibus hominum fugam capit versus Johannem regem Valachiae”). Johannitsa sent those Byzantines back into Thrace and Macedonia, to stir riots against the Latins. Niketas Choniates claims that the troops sent by Johannitsa, which also included many Cumans, infiltrated Thrace, “striving to remain unnoticed by the Latins”, and were able to prevent the Latins from moving beyond Arcadiopolis (a city first held by the Venetians, then abandoned and seized by the French). Geoffroy de Villehardouin and Robert de Clari confirm Johannitsa’s alliance with those Byzantine men. According to the French chroniclers, the Byzantine men sent envoys to Johannitsa, “king of Vlachia and Bulgaria,” and promised to recognize him as their emperor if he would go to war against the Latins. Thus, in the spring of 1205, Adrianople and Didymoteichon were freed by Byzantine army men, who received “much assistance from the Vlachs,” but who relied on the inhabitants of the cities to rise in rebellion against the Latins. Local Byzantine leaders (*archontes*) in Thrace wanted to recover the city of Arkadiopolis, which, after a series of clashes in February 1205, was abandoned by the Latins, as it was difficult to hold in the middle of enemy territory.<sup>93</sup> Arkadiopolis controlled the road from Adriannople to Constantinople. The city had seen many battles along the years. Besides that of 1194, mentioned in the previous chapter, an important battle had taken place there in the summer of 970, in which the Byzantine general Bardas Skleros scored a decisive victory against the Rus’ Prince Svyatoslav.<sup>94</sup>

As shown in a letter written in 1218 by Demetrios Chomatenos, Archbishop of Ohrid, John x Kamateros, the patriarch of Constantinople who had taken refuge in Didymoteichon, mediated Johannitsa’s alliance with the Greeks.

93 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 9 (ed. Van Dieten, 612–614; transl. Magoulias, 335–336; FHDR III, 312/313–314/315); *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, ed. de Smet, 133 (Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 297); Geoffroy, c. 333, 335, 339 (ed. Faral, II, 144–150; transl. Fluieraru, 146–148); Baudoin d’Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 665 (ed. Markov, 64/65–66/67); Longnon 1949, 77; Ostrogorsky 1956, 449; Vlachos 1970, 273–275; Hansen-Löwe 1971, 106–107; Prinzing 1972, 2–24, 48; Primov 1975, 57–58; Asdracha 1976, 237; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 62; Gagova 1986b, 199; Phillips 2004, 288; Gagova 2005, 51–52; Ducellier 2008, 783–784; Külzer 2008, 141, 265; Mărculeț 2010a, 72–73; Murdzhev 2011, 76; Van Tricht 2011, 389.

94 Fine 1991, 183–186; Treadgold 1997, 508. Another battle took place in Arkadiopolis during the First Balkan War (October 28–November 3, 1912). It ended with a Bulgarian victory against the Turks.

In the eyes of the patriarch at least, Johannitsa assumed the role of the emperor of Constantinople when granting protection to the inhabitants of Thrace.<sup>95</sup>

An inscription in Bulgarian laid at the foundation of the Kritsuva fortification (Kirtsovon, now Karydochori, in the northern part of the Greek province of Macedonia, north of Serres) is dated to this period of cooperation between Bulgarians and the Byzantine men who remained loyal to Alexios III: “I, Vrana, Grand Duke, have built the city of Kritsuva on May 21st 6712 (1204) at the request of Tsar Kaloyan” (“Ază Vrana duka velikă sătăvori(khă) grada Kricuva (ma) mešătsa 6712 za molită vă Kaloioana tsare”).<sup>96</sup> The Grand Duke mentioned in the inscription was a member of the same Vranas family, another member of which (Theodore, Alexios’ son) pledged himself to Baldwin.<sup>97</sup> The Vranas mentioned in the inscription served Johannitsa as commander of Kritsuva, a town located within the territory occupied in the fall of 1203.

The Greek population in Adrianople and the neighboring cities suffered at the hand of the Venetians and that is why, as noted by Bernard, they requested Johannitsa’s help (*si mandèrent au seigneur de Blakie qu’il les secourust*), through a message sent on February 13th, 1205 (*Et ce fu .xv. jours devant quaresme prenant que li mesages i ala*).<sup>98</sup> Johannitsa promised to send them help before Easter (*il lor manda ariere que volentiers les secourroit dedens le Pasque*), and when the Venetians learned about it, they quickly evacuated Adrianople and the neighboring cities and went to Constantinople, where they requested the assistance of Emperor Baldwin (he received the message on February 24th).<sup>99</sup> Geoffroy de Villehardouin,<sup>100</sup> Baudoin d’Avesnes,<sup>101</sup> Robert de Clari,<sup>102</sup> Johannes Longus,<sup>103</sup> and George Akropolites<sup>104</sup> all recounted the rebellion in Adrianople, albeit at different lengths.

95 Demetrios Chomatenos, 262\*, 426 (nr. 146); Vasiliev 1958, 509; Prinzing 1972, 5–6, 15.

96 Prinzing 1972, 76; Malingoudis 1979, 47–49; Petkov 2008, 425; Angelov 2011, 107; Biliarsky 2011, 356.

97 For this, see Bendall, Morrisson 1994, 176–177.

98 Because Easter in 1205 was on April 10, the 15th day before the beginning of the Lent was February 13.

99 Bernard, ed. Las Matric, 378–379 (trad. Fluieraru, 200–201).

100 Geoffroy, c. 335, 336 (ed. Faral, II, 146–147; transl. Fluieraru, 147).

101 Baudoin d’Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 660 (ed. Markov, 54/55).

102 Robert de Clari, c. 112 (ed. Lauer, 105–106; transl. Fluieraru, 169).

103 Johannes Longus, 824: “Post hec civitas Andronopolis cum adiacente patria, que in sortem obvenerat Venetorum, contra eos rebellant et a Iohanne domino Blactorum auxilium querunt.”

104 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 21; transl. Macrides, 139; FHDR III, p. 400/401).

Baldwin marched out of Constantinople on March 25th, 1205, in order to take back Adrianople. Among his commanders were Enrico Dandolo, the Doge of Venice, Count Louis of Blois, as well as Marshall Geoffroy de Villehardouin. They set up camp near the city on March 29th, and began the siege, using war machines and even (and unsuccessfully) trying to sap the ramparts.<sup>105</sup> Johannitsa kept his word and came with an army to save Adrianople. Besides Vlachs and Bulgarians, his army included 14,000 Cumans,<sup>106</sup> who played the decisive role in the ensuing battle.

The Cumans were once again Johannitsa's allies. Judging from the testimony of George Akropolites, at an unknown date Johannitsa married a Cuman woman, probably the daughter or sister of some khan. According to Akropolites, the woman whom Boril, who was Johannitsa's nephew, married in 1207 was Johannitsa's widow, a "Scythian."<sup>107</sup> It is possible that the marriage was meant to solidify the increased cooperation between Johannitsa and the Cumans north of the Danube. At any rate, the alliance with the Cumans has been a key feature of Asanid policies. As Angel Nikolov noted, "being of Cumanic or Vlacho-Cumanic origin, the Assenides, despite their clearly Bulgarian royal ideology, continued the active partnership with the large Cumanic diaspora north of the Danube, even after the success of their revolt. The Cumans, being mercenaries and allies, played a significant role in almost all the successful military campaigns of the Second Bulgarian state."<sup>108</sup>

The events that followed are known in detail because of several accounts, of which the most extensive and important is the chronicle of Geoffroy de Villehardouin. Equally important for the Latin perspective are the letter of regent Henry (who later became an emperor), the chronicles of Flanders and the chronicle of Bernard, while Robert de Clari is much more laconic. The battle was also recounted in the *Chronicle of Morea* (the most developed being the Greek version). The Byzantine point of view is mainly represented by Niketas Choniates, but there is additional information in George Akropolites, Theodore Skutariotes, and Nikephoros Gregoras. The importance of the battle derives from the importance of the town itself, which was the furthest and

105 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 9 (ed. Van Dieten, 615; transl. Magoulias, 337; FHDR III, 314/315–316/317); Geoffroy, c. 350, 353 (ed. Faral, II, 160–163; transl. Fluieraru, 151, 152); Bernard, ed. Las Matric, 381–382 (trad. Fluieraru, 202–203).

106 Geoffroy, c. 352 (ed. Faral, II, 160–162; transl. Fluieraru, 151); *Chronique de Flandre*, 98.

107 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 25; transl. Macrides, 140; FHDR III, 402/403); Spinei 2006, 411; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 43.

108 Nikolov 2005, 228.

most important outpost of Constantinople, ever since the foundation of the Second Rome. Adrianople was also a prosperous city, worth conquering.

Johannitsa's advanced on Adrianople on April 13th, with Cuman scouts checking the size and the resources of the enemy forces. Meanwhile, the Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman army occupied the hills near Adrianople, without being noticed by those inside the city, which was at a distance of about 20 km.<sup>109</sup> On April 14, Cuman horsemen led by a certain Kotzas (Koža)<sup>110</sup> reached the camp of the crusaders. Confident in their strength, the Western knights led by emperor Baldwin himself, charged and followed the Cumans for about 8 km, even though during a meeting on the previous night they had agreed to stay together and not leave their position in the camp near the city. In fact, using the feigned-retreat stratagem, the Cumans lured the knights into an ambush. Many were massacred. Niketas Choniates describes the outcome:

The Latins, exhausted from the exertion of the chase, with horses thoroughly spent, were ensnared by the unwearied Cuman troops, cut off, and encircled. Overpowered by the multitude of Cumans in hand-to-hand combat, they were thrown from their horses. One was surrounded by many; the throats of the stiff-necked were exposed to the scimitar or to the noose, and many of their horses were mutilated. As the Cumans fell upon them like a never-ending black cloud, they could not disentangle themselves from the horses or find any means of escape.

The battle ended in a disaster for the Latins, who completely ignored the combat style of the Cumans<sup>111</sup> (much like the Western knights would ignore the Ottoman tactics in the battle of Nicopolis on September 25th, 1396). Louis of Blois and other notable noblemen were killed, and the emperor was taken prisoner. Meanwhile, Geoffroy de Villehardouin was in command of the camp. He managed to ward off the following attack on the camp and organized the retreat to Constantinople. Johannitsa followed the remains of the Latin army up to Charioupolis (now Hayrabolu).<sup>112</sup>

109 At the French authors of that time, a league was equal with circa 4 km (Asdracha 1976, 49).

110 For the real name of the Cuman chief, see Vásáry 2005, 50. He belonged to the clan of Kőcoba (see Kráštef 1997, 128).

111 Mitchell 2008; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 47–49.

112 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 9 (ed. Van Dieten, 615–617; transl. Magoulias, 337–338; FHDR III, 316/317); Geoffroy, c. 355–368 (ed. Faral, II, 164–177; transl. Fluieraru, 152–156); Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 666–667 (ed. Markov, 56/57–58/59, 102/103–104/105); Robert de Clari, c. 112 (ed. Lauer, 106; transl. Fluieraru,

The unfolding of the battle has been reconstructed thorough the collation of bits of information from Niketas Choniates, Georgios Akropolites, Geoffroy de Villehardouin, the Chronicles of Flanders, and the chronicle of Bernard. There is, however, a slightly different account that appears in all four versions of the *Chronicle of Morea*. In that account, Johannitsa, king of Vlachia (Βλαχία in the Greek version, *Blaquie* in the French one, *Blaquia* in the Aragonese one, *Valachia* in the Italian one) sends 500 men (Vlachs in the Italian version) to lure the Flemish and French knights into an ambush. The Aragonese version also mentions the participation of Alans.<sup>113</sup>

On June 5, 1205, Baldwin's brother, Henry, sent to the pope a long message describing the revolt of the perfidious Greeks against Latin rule. In that context, he also gave a brief account of the battle of Adrianople, the center of the rebellion (*caput rebellionis, Adrianopolim videlicet, que civitas est Grecie munitissima*). In that account, Henry blamed the defeat on an ambush (*per inimicorum insidias*) and mentioned that the adversaries led by *Iohannitius, Blachorum domino*, outnumbered the crusaders (*multitudine barbarorum innumera, Blachis videlicet, Commannis et aliis*).<sup>114</sup> According to the *Chronicle of Flanders* the crusaders were outnumbered twenty to one.<sup>115</sup> This was regarded as the result of Baldwin's wrong decision to engage the enemy before the arrival of the reinforcements from Asia Minor, which could have been a considerable advantage in the battle.<sup>116</sup> The Greek version of the *Chronicle of Morea*, however, blamed the inability of the crusaders to adapt to the enemy's tactics:

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169–170); Bernard, ed. Las Matric, 382–385 (trad. Fluieraru, 203–206); *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, ed. de Smet, 138 (Tafel, *Urkunden*, I, 303); *Chronique de Flandre*, 83–84, 97–98; Albericus, ed. Pertz, 885 (Andrea 2008, 307; FLHB IV, 182–183); Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 21–22; transl. Macrides, 139; FHDR III, 400/401); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 458–459; FHDR III, 436/437; FGHB VIII, 265); Nikephor Gregoras, I, 2 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 70; FGHB XI, 124–125); Longnon 1949, 78–80; Vlachos 1970, 274–275; Hansen-Löwe 1971, 107–110; Primov 1975, 59–60; Carile 1978, 233; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 63–66; Dall'Aglia 2003b, 96–98; Phillips 2004, 288–291; Pavlovska 2006; Spinei 2006, 416–417; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 49–50; J. Barker, *Adrianople, battle of (1205)*, in OEWMT, I, pp. 5–6; Mărculeț 2010a, 73–78; Jordanov 2011.

113 *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1082–1167 (Camariano 1944, 356–361; ed. Lurier, 99–101; Shawcross 2009, 340–342, 345–349; FHDR IV, 167/168–170/171); Božilov 1977a, 46–48; Kyriakidis 2013, 44–45.

114 Brial, *Recueil*, 525 = PL, vol. 215, 707 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 51–52 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 366; Primov 1975, 60; Hendrickx 1988, 41; Dall'Aglia 2003a, 140–143.

115 *Chronique de Flandre*, 98.

116 Noble 2001, 408.

Now, the Franks expected to give them battle with spears and swords, as they were accustomed to do. But the Cumans fled and did not come close to them; they only shot arrows at them with their bows and they let loose so many that they killed them; for the chargers perished, the knights fell. They had Turkish *salives* (maces) and clubs; with these they beat them on their helmets.<sup>117</sup>

During the second phase of the battle of Adrianople, Johannitsa's forces attempted to take the city. According to Georgios Akropolites,

Then the emperor of the Bulgarians set out to become master of their city, in accordance with the promises that had been made by the Adrianopolitans, but they refused this. Angered by their deceit, the emperor of the Bulgarians resolved to besiege them. But the Bulgarians are completely without ability in siegecraft, for they know neither how to set up siege engines, nor can they devise any other means of making an assault.<sup>118</sup>

For Byzantine authors, *helepolis* was not the siege tower that Greek armies used in the Classical age, but a stone-hurling catapult, which Westerners called trebuchet.<sup>119</sup> That siege machine was a Chinese invention introduced by Avars into Europe during the 6th century.<sup>120</sup> Choniates, Villehardouin and Robert de Clari clearly point out that Johannitsa relied on siege machines at Varna in March 1201 and on several other occasions when attacking Serres, Didymoteichon, Adrianople and Thessaloniki (see below). But in April 1205, he was not able to take Adrianople. His great victory, however, was against the crusaders. The capture of Baldwin was the supreme prize to which he could not have probably dreamed.

In August or September 1205, Innocent III wrote to Johannitsa asking him to release the emperor, as a first sign of reconciliation with the Latin Empire (he also sent a letter to Henry I of Hainaut, asking him to make peace with Johannitsa).<sup>121</sup> Clearly, it was in the interest of the papacy to secure peace-

117 *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1150–1156 (Camariano 1944, 357–358, 360–361; ed. Lurier, 100; Shawcross 2009, 342, 349; FHDR IV, 170/171).

118 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 22; transl. Macrides, 140; FHDR III, 400/401).

119 Dennis 1998; Kyriakidis 2011, 172–173.

120 De Vries 1992, 133–140; Chevedden 2000.

121 PL, vol. 215, 705–706, 710 (n. 129, 132) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 54 (doc. XXXVIII) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 314 (nr. 89) = FLHB III, 363–364, 368–369; Wolff 1952, 289; Primov

ful relations and cooperation between those states that recognized the papal primacy. Johannitsa, although recently crowned by the pope, remained the enemy both of the Latin Empire and of Hungary. His response to the pope's letter does not survive, but was summarized in Johannitsa's response mentioned in *Gesta Innocentii III*:

The aforementioned Ioannitius or Caloioannes, king of Bulgarians and Vlachs, responded that, hearing about the conquest of the royal citadel [Constantinople], had sent messengers and letters to the Latins to be in peace with them; they, however, replied haughtily, saying that they will not have peace with him and will not recognize him the territory which belonged to the Empire of Constantinople, which he had invaded with violence. To this, he answered: that he justly holds the territory once occupied by Constantinople, as he recovered a territory his ancestors had abandoned and which had been occupied by Constantinople; furthermore, that he had legitimately received a royal crown from the Supreme Pontiff and that, in contrast, the one named Vassilyeum of Constantinople got his crown incidentally, by usurpation. (...) Provoked by the Latins, he was compelled to defend himself against them.<sup>122</sup>

Johannitsa's answer, although not dated with any precision, clearly emphasizes his legitimate claims to rule over territories that were once Byzantine (Moesia and Thrace), and his understanding that, unlike the Latin emperor

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1975, 61–62; Gjuzelev 1977a, 44; Papacostea 1993, 24, 29; Mălinaş 2000, 167; Moore 2003, 159; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 143–144; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 101–102; Markov 2010, 44–45.

122 PL, vol. 214, CXLVII–CXLVIII (*Innocentii III Papae Gesta*, c. CVIII) = FLHB III, 378: “Praefatus vero Ioannitius, sive Caloioannes, rex Bulgarorum et Blacorum, respondit, quo ipse audita captione regiae civitatis, miserat nuntios et litteras ad Latinos, ut cum eis pacem haberet; sed ipsi ei superbissime responderunt, dicentes, quod pacem non haberent cum illo, nisi redderet terram ad Constantinopolitanum imperium pertinentem quam ipse invaserat violenter. Quibus ipse repondit: quod terra illa iustius possidebatur ab ipso, quam Constantinopolis possideretur ab illis, nam ipse recuperaverat terram quam progenitores eius amiserant, sed ipsi Constantinopolim occupaverant, quae ad eos minime pertinebat: ipse praeterea coronam regni legitime receperat a summo pontifice; sed ipse, qui se appellabat Constantinopolitanum Vassilyeum, coronam imperii temere usurpaverat a se ipso (...) Provocatus igitur a Latinis, compulsus fuit ut defenderet se ab illis.” See Wolff 1949, 202–203; Hendrickx 1970, 142–143; Primov 1975, 60; Brezeanu 1980, 661; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 54; Hendrickx 1988, 17–19; Brezeanu 1989b, 6–7; Dall'Aglio 2002, 263; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 146–147; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 94; Petkov 2008, 230.

of Constantinople, he had been crowned by the pope.<sup>123</sup> He considered himself the rightful successor of Byzantium, and regarded the Latin usurpers who had unjustly occupied Thrace, which had belonged to the First Bulgarian Empire. The idea of Roman descent that appears in his correspondence with Innocent III provided an additional justification for the imperial title. As the Latin Empire also claimed to be the legitimate successor of the Byzantine Empire, including the territories it had previously lost, confrontation was inevitable. Henry I's ambition was apparently to make Bulgaria a vassal state, a *terra* subject to imperial power.<sup>124</sup> He tried to stir trouble between Johannitsa and Innocent III, and suggested to the latter pope (letter of June 5, 1205) that the king of Bulgaria was ready to make alliances with the Turks and other enemies of Christianity (probably Bogomil heretics).<sup>125</sup>

As for Baldwin, Johannitsa announced his death in the same letter recorded in *Gesta Innocentii III* (*debitum carnis exsolverat*). As a matter of fact, the fate of the first Latin emperor of Constantinople remained unclear for a while. Some even supposed that Baldwin survived a longer time. In 1225, an impostor appeared, pretending to be him.<sup>126</sup> On June 5, 1205, his brother, Henry, wrote to the pope that according to the information provided by his spies, Baldwin was alive and well.<sup>127</sup> In February 1206, in another message to Innocent III, Henry indicated that *a Comannis in bello Andrinopolitano captus fuerit*.<sup>128</sup> Later, on July 14, 1206, Geoffroy de Villehardouin learned from Renier of Trit that Baldwin had died. Henry was therefore crowned emperor of Constantinople on August 20, 1206.<sup>129</sup> Even after the coronation, in September 1206, Henry continued to

123 So Prinzing 1972, 29–35, who believed that the idea of the Roman origin was helpful for the claiming of the imperial title.

124 Prinzing 1972, 27; Primov 1975, 57; Brezeanu 1989b, 6, 8 (who has clarified the meaning of the word *terra*); Papacostea 1993, 14, 20.

125 PL, vol. 215, 708 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 52 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 367; Lazăr, Murat 2010, 41; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 142.

126 Wolff 1952, 294–301; Primov 1975, 61; Phillips 2004, 296–298.

127 PL, vol. 215, 707 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 52 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 366: “Accepimus tamen ab exploratoribus nostris certissimis et fama veridica, quod dominus meus imperator sanus teneatur et vivus.”

128 PL, vol. 214, CXLVI (*Innocentii III Papae Gesta*, c. CVI) = FLHB III, 376; Hendrickx 1970, 144–145; Papacostea 1993, 24.

129 Geoffroy, c. 439–441 (ed. Faral, II, 252–255; transl. Fluieraru, 177–178); Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 527; FLHB IV, 13; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 41); *Chronique de Flandre*, 99; Longnon 1949, 87–89; Wolff 1952, 289–290; Wolff 1969, 204; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 53.



believe that his brother, who had been captured at Adrianople, was still “cruelly detained” in Bulgaria.<sup>130</sup>

Robert de Clari did not know what happened to Baldwin, but both Geoffroy de Villehardouin and Baudoin d’Avesnes thought that he had been taken prisoner. The same version, but more elaborated (*in regnum Valachiae captum ducunt*), appears in *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*. Bernard, who wrote his chronicle in the Abbey of St. Peter in Corbie in 1232, believed that Baldwin had been slain in battle.<sup>131</sup> His death in battle is also mentioned in the *Chronicle of Morea*.<sup>132</sup> Among Byzantine historians, Choniates knew that Baldwin had been taken to Târnovo, where he was imprisoned and chained. After several months, filled with anger against the Latins, Johannitsa decided to kill him (his hands and feet were cut off and he was thrown off a cliff, where he laid for three days).<sup>133</sup> Baldwin’s killing in Târnovo is also mentioned by Patriarch Euthymios of Târnovo, in his biography of Saint John Polivotski.<sup>134</sup> George Akropolites claimed that Johannitsa kept his skull as a chalice,<sup>135</sup> a reminiscence khan Krum’s turning Emperor Nikephoros I’s skull into a cup in 811. Albericus learned from a priest traveling to Târnovo that Johannitsa’s wife had made advances to Baldwin, offering to run with him to Constantinople, where she would become his empress. Baldwin refused, and, like Potiphar’s wife, the woman then accused him of having tried to seduce her. Filled with anger, Johannitsa ordered his execution and the hacking of his corpse, which was fed to the dogs.<sup>136</sup> None of these stories can be trusted, and it is possible that the emperor died from his wounds. Baldwin’s imprisonment in Târnovo gave birth to the legend of him being locked up in the watchtower overlooking the

130 Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 528; FLHB IV, 13; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 38): “a Commannis in bello ante Adrianopoli captus fuerit et detentus, et a Johannicio sanctae Crucis inimico crudeliter incarcerationatus.” See Cankova-Petkova 1976, 52; Phillips 2004, 295.

131 Bernard, ed. Las Matrie, 384 (trad. Fluieraru, 205): “Et li Blac et li Comain salirent hors de l’embuissement, si les avironerent et là se combatirent, et ocisent tous ceus de le compaignie l’empereur et lui avec.”

132 *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1158 (Camariano 1944, 358, 361; ed. Lurier, 100; Shawcross 2009, 342, 349; FHDR IV, 170/171); Božilov 1977a, 48–49.

133 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 16 (ed. Van Dieten, 616, 642; transl. Magoulias, 337, 353; FHDR III, 334/335); Wolff 1952, 290.

134 Petkov 2008, 339; Markov 2010, 38.

135 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 22; transl. Macrides, 139; FHDR III, 400/401); Wolff 1952, 290; Phillips 2004, 295.

136 Albericus, ed. Pertz, 885 (Andrea 2008, 307; FLHB IV, 182); Jireček 1876, 240; Wolff 1952, 290–291; Vlachos 1970, 273–275; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 53; Phillips 2004, 295.



FIGURE 4 The “Baldwin Tower” in Tărnovo.  
AUTHOR’S PHOTO.

southeastern corner of the Tsarevets citadel (there is in fact no proof that he had been held in there) (see Figure 4).<sup>137</sup>

The defeat at Adrianople created so much sensation among the Western Christians, that it was mentioned even in chronicles that were not usually interested in wars across the world, e.g., the chronicle of the Bishopric of Halberstadt, according to which Baldwin had been slain in battle by Johannitsa, the king of the Vlachs.<sup>138</sup> Echoes of the battle of Adrianople also reached Genoa, where chronicler Ogerio Pane recorded the defeat suffered by the French army led by Baldwin of Flanders. He knew that they had been overwhelmed by the Vlachs (the name was distorted, *Brachi*), who

137 Markov 2010, 28–46 has examined all the sources, concluding that Baldwin most probable died at Tărnovo, or on the road, because the injuries he had suffered in the battle.

138 *Gesta episcoporum Halberstadensium*, 118 (Andrea 2008, 255): “Baldwinus comes Flandrie imperator (...) a Iohannicio Blacorum rege in bello occisus.”

captured the emperor.<sup>139</sup> The events are presented more concisely in Robert of Auxerre's universal chronicle, written in 1211 in the abbey of Saint-Marien of Auxerre. The name of the king of Vlachs and Bulgarians allied with the Cumans, the Greeks and the Turks is not given, but his victory is attributed to divine will.<sup>140</sup> A similar account may be found in the chronicle of Sicardus,<sup>141</sup> which however does not mention Bulgarians among the participants. Sicardus, who lived in Constantinople at the time, believed that Baldwin had been slain in battle. His information was reproduced by Albertus Miliol, with *Blacti* replacing *Blacci*.<sup>142</sup> A similar account may be found in the anonymous continuation of the chronicle of Robert of Mont Saint-Michel.<sup>143</sup> In all those sources, the main role is held by *Blaci*, with Cumans as auxiliaries.

The information got even more distorted by the time it reached the Cistercian abbey of Coggeshall. Its abbot Ralph, who wrote a chronicle of England, thought that Baldwin had been captured in an ambush at Adrianople by a Greek ruler named *Ioan Blacus*, and then held in captivity. However,

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139 Ogerio (ed. Pertz, 123; ed. Belgrano, 95; FLHB IV, 144): "In eodem anno comes Flandrensis, qui sedem Constantinopolitanam susceperat, cum magno militum Francorum numero et cum duce Venetico et gente sua ad obsidionem Andrinopolis perrexit; ibique infestati et preliati a Brachis, surrexerunt ad arma, secuti fuerunt illos terga uergentes et ex eis innumeram quantitatem prostrauerunt et interfecerunt. Set tandem Brachi reuertentes, illum ceperunt cum 300 militibus Franchis, qui omnes in faciem gladii mortui fuerunt, et personam imperatoris retinuerunt."

140 Robert de Auxerre, 269: "Anno Domini 1205 nostri qui Constantinopolim ceperant, cum eis hucusque feliciter successisset, nunc circa feriatos dies 10 pasche gravi admodum infortunio sunt afflicti. Rex enim Blacorum et Bulgarorum cum Cumanis, Grecis et Turcis aduersus eos pugnantes, Domino permittente, vicerunt, maioribus in bello peremptis."

141 Sicardus, 179: "Anno Domini MCCV. Baldoinus imperator Constantinopolitanus Grecos in Andrenopoli congregatos obsedit. Set a Blacis forinsecus congregatis et Cumanis ipse imperator cum quibusdam baronibus suis captus est et occisus. Exercitus autem illesus reversus est Constantinopolim. Cui prefuit Henricus frater imperatoris, duce Venetie iam mortuo, Marchio quoque Bonifacius, qui regnavit in Tesalonica, a Grecis et Blacis multa passus est."

142 Albertus Miliol, 655: "Eodem anno Balduinus imperator Constantinopolitanus Grecos in Andrinopoli congregatos obsedit; sed a Blactis forinsecus agregatis et Cumanis cum quibusdam ex baronibus suis vel occisis vel captis pariter et captus est et consequenter occisus. Ideoque recedens ab obsidione confusus Latinorum exercitus, tamen rediit in urbem Constantinianam illesus."

143 *Continuatio Roberti* (Brial, *Recueil*, 342): "Hoc etiam anno, Balduinus Constantinopolitanus Imperator, alique multi occisi sunt a Joanne de Blac in bello."

he also knew that *Ioan* was the ruler of a country named *Blakia*.<sup>144</sup> The capture of Baldwin was also recalled in *La Philippide*, the chronicle in verse written by William the Breton (1165–1226), the chaplain of king Philip II Augustus (1179–1223). To William, *Johannitsa* was *Thracus dux*.<sup>145</sup> Philippe Mouskés, in his rhymed chronicle, mentions Baldwin being killed while in captivity among Vlachs and Cumans.<sup>146</sup> Albericus, however, knew that Baldwin had been captured during the war against *Iohannicius Bulgarie et Blackarie domnus*, but believed the battle to have taken place in a swamp (“captus est ab eo per dolum in paludibus aquosis, de quibus non possent exire nisi terre indigene”).<sup>147</sup> Later works written in Venice in the 14th and 15th centuries distorted reality even further. Andrea Dandolo, for example, believed that there were two kings, one of the Vlachs, the other of the Bulgarians,<sup>148</sup> while according to Lorenzo de Monacis (who wrote his chronicle in 1428) Baldwin fought *Janucius rex Ulachiae* and a king of the Bulgarians, who had an army of Greeks, Turks and Cumans.<sup>149</sup> Better informed, Giovanni Giacomo Caroldo wrote that “the king of the Walachians and the Bulgarians, with a great number of pagans,” who had been invited by the Greeks, attacked the Latins (“li Re di Valacchi et di Bulgari, con gran numero d’Infideli, invitati da Greci forausciti, assalirono il campo de Latini”).<sup>150</sup>

After the battle of Adrianople, Thrace and Macedonia were thoroughly plundered by *Johannitsa*’s army, especially by Cumans, who reached the outskirts of Constantinople. In early June, the Cumans left, most likely because of a wave of excessive heat, but the attacks of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians continued throughout the year 1205, and in the spring of the following year.<sup>151</sup>

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144 Radulphus of Coggeshall, 161–162 (Andrea 2008, 287; FLHB IV, 137–138): “Captus est Baldewinus Imperator Constantinopolitanus apud Andrianopolim civitatem Thraciae, a quondam Johanne Blaco potenti Graeco, per insidias, et in carcerem reclusus. (...) In septimana Paschae feria quinta, captus fuit praedictus Imperator (...), dum ab exercitu suo semotus incaute obequitaret ad prandium cum sexaginta militibus. Filius praedicti Johannis Blaki erat interim cum Papa Innocentio, coronandus ab eo, ex petitione patris, de regno quod dicitur Blakia.”

145 MGH-SS, vol. XXVI, Hannovera, 1882, 343.

146 Mouskés, 308 (v. 20460–20464); Ciobanu 1976, 252.

147 Albericus, 885 (Andrea 2008, 307; FLHB IV, 182).

148 Dandolo, 280 (*rex Blacorum et rex Bulgarorum, cum Grecis ac Turcis et Cumanis*).

149 Lorenzo de Monacis, 141.

150 Caroldo, 177.

151 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 618; transl. Magoulias, 338; FHDR III, 318/319); Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 23; transl. Macrides,

Those are the Tzasimpakis, 264 events to which the *Chronicle of Morea* refers in a passage, in which John, also known as Vatatzes, the ruler of Vlachia and Ellada, calls 10,000 men from Cumania to come. Johannitsa is obviously mistaken for John III Vatatzes, Emperor of Nicaea, but also for the despots ruling Thessalian Vlachia at the time of the chronicle. The same passage also mentions the participation of a group of Turks (also called Turkomans) along with Cumans, a detail also reproduced in the Venetian chronicles. If not spurious, this information may in fact suggest that Johannitsa attempted at some point to forge an alliance with the Seljuk Turks, namely with Kaykhusraw I (1205–1211), as indicated in Henry of Hainaut's letter to the pope of June 5, 1205 mentioned above, but also in the chronicle of Robert of Auxerre. Johannitsa's alliance with the Turks was also mentioned in a letter the pope wrote to an unknown churchmen: "That king of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians fought against the Latins together with the Cumans, the Turks, and the Greeks" (*Rex quoque Blachorum et Bulgarorum cum Cumanis, Turcis et Grecis adversus Latinos pugnantes*).<sup>152</sup>

One of the most important results of the 1205 campaign was the conquest of Serres, in northwestern Macedonia. Both Choniates and Villehardouin cover the siege of Serres. On May 29, 1205, Johannitsa moved against the Kingdom of Thessalonica, ruled by Boniface of Montferat. Johannitsa's army—Vlachs, Bulgarians, and Greeks from Thrace—was initially defeated in a series of encounters, but managed to chase away Boniface's troops. He took refuge in Serres, a citadel defended by a garrison commanded by Hugh of Coligny (subsequently killed in the battle). First, Johannitsa's warriors were able to penetrate the outer defense, but resistance stopped them at the small inner fortification, which Villehardouin calls *borc* and Choniates *koula*.<sup>153</sup> As many other strongholds in the region, Serres therefore had a citadel (see chapter 10). To take the citadel, according to Niketas Choniates, Johannitsa set on a neighboring hill a very large counterpoise trebuchet (*helepolis*). Villehardouin claims that the attackers employed *perrieres*, a term that also refers to trebuchets, to be distinguished from smaller traction catapults called mangonels

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140; FHDR III, 400/401); Geoffroy, c. 386, 387, 389 (ed. Faral, II, 194–199; transl. Fluieraru, 161, 162); Vlachos 1970, 275; Primov 1975, 61; Papacostea 1993, 20; Vásáry 2005, 51.

152 *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1030–1050 (Camariano 1944, 354–355, 358; ed. Lurier, 97–98; Shawcross 2009, 338–339, 343; FHDR IV, 165/166); PL, vol. 215, 698 (n. CXXV) = FLHB III, 362–363; Hansen-Löwe 1971, 104; Zlatarski 1972, III, 220–221; Prinzing 1972, 79–80; Božilov 1977a, 40–45; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 143; Dall'Aglio 2003b, 101.

153 This word of Arabic origin was sometimes used in the 11th century by Byzantine authors to refer to an *akropolis*. See Du Cange 1688, 729.

(see below, for the siege of Didymoteichon of June 1206). Despite all their efforts, the attackers were not able to break the walls. Nonetheless, lacking any provisions, the men besieged inside the citadel eventually surrendered. They were promised free passage to Hungary, but Villehardouin claims that Johannitsa broke his promise, confiscated all their possessions, and took them in chains to Vlachia.<sup>154</sup>

The attacks of the Vlachs (*Blacs*) on Boniface of Montferrat's kingdom are also mentioned in two poems by Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, a troubadour in the service of the marquis. Both were written in June-July 1205.<sup>155</sup> Following the destruction of the fortress of Serres, Johannitsa's army moved to an even more important city, Verroia (now Veria), located on Via Egnatia to the west from Thessaloniki. According to Demetrios Chomatenos, some of the inhabitants of Verroia were killed, others taken captive and forcefully moved to the lands by the Danube. The Latin bishop of the city fled and was immediately replaced by a Bulgarian, who settled together with a Bulgarian governor (*ἀρχηγός*).<sup>156</sup> Moglena (near present-day Chrysi in Greek Macedonia) was also taken. *The Life of Saint Hilarion of Moglena* mentions how, during the conquest of Macedonia, Kaloian spent one hundred days in that city.<sup>157</sup>

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Thessaloniki rebelled against the Latins, taking advantage of the fact that Boniface was in the Peloponnese. The rebellion coincided in time with the siege of Serres. In June 1205, a Vlach whom Niketas Choniates calls Etsuismenos took power in the city. He had besieged the city while Boniface had been away. Some believe that his real name was Šišman, a name of Cuman origin, much like Asan. At any rate, he had previously been "charged with the security of Prosakos and all neighboring lands ruled by John," after Prosek had been taken by Johannitsa from Dobromir Chrysos. The citadel of Prosakos was most probably occupied in 1203, when a part of Macedonia was conquered (nothing is known about what happened after that to Dobromir Chrysos). An inscription mentions a Šišman with the title of *sevast*, which in Bulgaria and Serbia had been adopted in imitation of

154 Geoffroy, c. 392–394 (ed. Faral, II, 202–205; transl. Fluieraru, 163–164); Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 619; transl. Magoulias, 338–339; FHDR III, 318/319–320/321); Longnon 1949, 82; Hendrickx 1970, 162; Vlachos 1970, 276–277; Božilov 1985, 51–52; Fine 1994, 84; Dall'Aglia 2003b, 98–99. For the difference between *perriere* or *petraria* and mangonel, see France 2001, 118–124; Nicolle 2002, 11–24.

155 Găzdaru 1954, 104–109; Agrigoroaei 2009, 57–58; Gagova 2013, 265.

156 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, II (ed. Van Dieten, 620; transl. Magoulias, 340; FHDR III, 322/323); Demetrios Chomatenos, 129\*, 171\*, 177, 191, 276 (nr. 48, 52, 81); Nicol 1976, 15.

157 Kravari 1989, 40, 82; Petkov 2008, 276–277.

the Byzantine hierarchy (although it is not altogether clear if in any of those countries the title represented a rank or a particular office).<sup>158</sup> The Aragonese version of the *Chronicle of Morea* briefly mentions that Vlachs and Bulgarians under the command of Johannitsa occupied Thessaloniki (“el emperador de Burgaria, preso Ssalonich, dexólo á los Griegos de la terra, & éll tornó s’ende en sus partidas de Burgaria”).<sup>159</sup> In reality, he was at time besieging Philippopolis (see below). Johannitsa tried again to take Thessaloniki in 1207.

In June 1205, Emperor Henry attempted to take the strategic initiative with an attack on Adrianople. His army passed through Arkadiopolis and reached Adrianople (also called Orestias by Choniates), trying to get its inhabitants to surrender. Their defensive system proved to be stronger than the Latins had hoped (they only used mangonels, not *perrieres*). Stricken by disease, Henry’s troops withdrew to Pamphylon (now Uzunköprü), a city located at a third of the distance between Charioupolis and Adrianople. On their way, they were constantly harassed by Vlachs and Cumans. The offensive resumed after a while, this time in the direction of Didymoteichon. There, a flood interrupted the siege, so the Latins withdrew again.<sup>160</sup> Henry I’s failed campaign looked bad in comparison with Johannitsa success at Philippopolis in June. To punish the city’s inhabitants, who had been on his side, only to switch later to the Latins, Johannitsa ordered the execution of many of them and the destruction of the city. According to Niketas Choniates,

in the past, when he had attempted to ensnare the city and had lain in wait to capture her, he had become exceedingly wrathful against the inhabitants for refusing to submit to him and recognize him as emperor, for turning away from him as a man of blood. His savage spirit was provoked to even greater fury when they installed Alexios Aspietes in the city and submitted to him as their ruler. When Ioannitsa attacked, they repelled him from many places with their arms.

158 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 11 (ed. Van Dieten, 619–620; transl. Magoulias, 339–340; FHDR III, 320/321); Jireček 1876, 240; Longnon 1949, 82; Moravcsik 1958, 11, 126; Hendrickx 1970, 139–140; Prinzing 1972, 50, 65, 66; Nicol 1976, 11–12, 26; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 70; Lazăr 2006, 22; Curta 2006, 384; Stavridou-Zafraza 2007, 116; Ducellier 2008, 784; Biliarsky 2011, 308–312.

159 Shawcross 2009, 339–340, 344; Božilov 1977a, 52–53; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 70.

160 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 11 (ed. Van Dieten, 621–624; transl. Magoulias, 340–342); Geoffroy, c. 395–397 (ed. Faral, 11, 204–208; transl. Fluieraru, 156, 164); Asdracha 1976, 139; Soustal 1991, 241; Vásáry 2005, 51; Külzer 2008, 560; Purton 2009, 335; Gagova 2011, 218.

The Paulician (Bogomil) heretics who lived in the city came on Johannitsa's side. Renier of Trit, the commander of the city, destroyed their residential quarter in retaliation, but in the end he had to flee to Stenimachos, where he remained in hiding until July 1206. Emperor Henry noted that the inhabitants of Philippopolis had been persuaded to surrender by Johannitsa's promise that he would not harm them. However, as soon as his army occupied the city, all noblemen were slaughtered, and the surviving commoners were taken to Vlachia.<sup>161</sup>

Johannitsa's 1206 campaign started early, on January 15 (see Map 5). Adrianople and Didymoteichon were still under the threat of Latin occupation. According to Villehardouin.

Johannitsa, king of Vlachia and Bulgaria, who was very powerful and wealthy, did not wait in vain, but got a great host of Cumans and Vlachs. And three weeks after Christmas he sent them to the land of *Romania* [Latin Empire] to help the men in Adrianople and those from Dimot. And when they got reinforcements, they took courage and rode more boldly.<sup>162</sup>

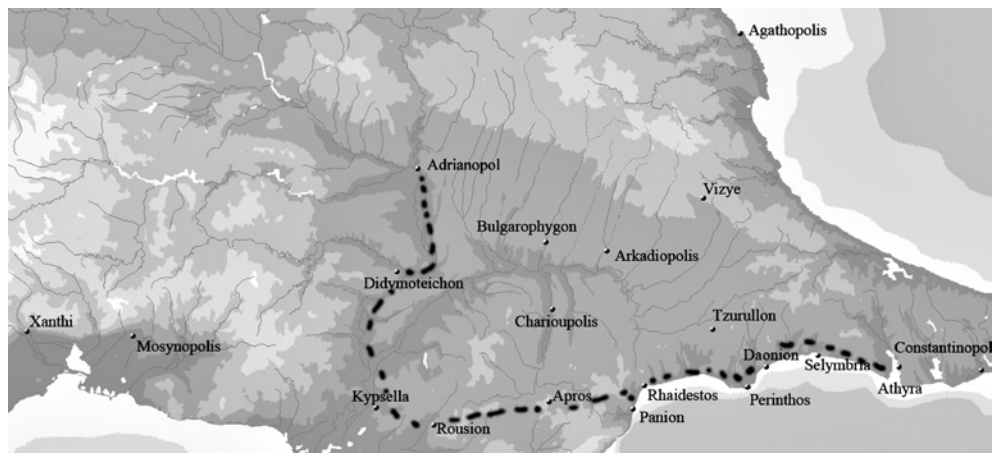
Johannitsa began the campaign with 7,000 Vlachs and Cumans, who on January 31, 1206 took Rousion (Ruskiöi, present-day Keşan), south of Didymoteichon, an important stronghold on the road from Thessaloniki to Constantinople. The small Latin garrison commanded by Thierry de Termonde was massacred, and the Vlachs and the Cumans withdrew with many fine horses and chain mails. Their victory had a great demoralizing effect on the Latins (Henry mentioned it in a letter to his brother), and Johannitsa took advantage of the situation to push farther with his campaign: "he forged a great

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161 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 11 (ed. Van Dieten, 627; transl. Magoulias, 343–344; FHDR III, 320/321); Geoffroy, c. 399–401, 435, 439–440 (ed. Faral, II, 208–213, 248–249, 252–255; transl. Fluieraru, 165–166, 176–178); Henri de Hainaut (Brial, *Recueil*, 525 = PL, vol. 215, 707–708 (n. CXXXI) = Hurmuzaki, Densuşianu 1887, 51–52 (doc. XXXVII) = FLHB III, 365–366); Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 528–529; FLHB IV, 14–15; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 39–41): "nobiles universos quosdam suspendio, quosdam aqua bullienti, quosdam aliis tormentorum poenis, quae vix ab homine excogitari possent, subjiciens, nequiter interfecit (...) deinde omnes plebeios tam masculos quam feminas in terram suam mittens, civitatem funditus subvertit (...) universos plebeios cum universa praeda sua et omnibus eorum mobilibus in Blakiam transmisit." See Longnon 1949, 82; Wolff 1952, 289; Wolff 1969, 203; Hendrickx 1970, 162; Vlachs 1970, 277–278; Prinzing 1972, 54–56; Primov 1975, 58; Asdracha 1976, 54, 61, 158, 237; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 71; Gagova 1986b, 198–199; Soustal 1991, 103, 401, 460; Fine 1994, 84; Vásáry 2005, 51; Ducellier 2008, 782.

162 Geoffroy, c. 404 (ed. Faral, II, 216–217; transl. Fluieraru, 167).





MAP 5 *The campaign in Thrace (January–February 1206).*

army of Cumans, Greeks, and Vlachs and entered *Romania*. Most strongholds and all castles joined him. And he had incredibly many men.”<sup>163</sup>

Niketas Choniates describes the campaign of 1206, as it looked like in February:

The barbarians advanced in rank and column to sweep everything before them, and like a whirlwind, or rather like a fire burning wood, they destroyed everything in their path. They missed nothing and plundered everything. Of the many large cities, only Vizye and Selymbria were not pillaged and razed by the Cumans. Surrounded by strong walls and strengthened by the site on which they were located, these cities alone escaped utter destruction; and besides, the Latins kept watch over them. The Italians reacted despicably to these events and turned Constantinople into a fold where they watched over all the useful belongings of the besieged; deploying themselves along the land walls, they allowed those Romans who wished to do so to depart. The enemy,

163 PL, vol. 214, CXLVI–CXLVII (*Innocentii III Papae Gesta*, c. CVI) = FLHB III, 377; Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 13 (ed. Van Dieten, 628; transl. Magoulias, 344; FHDR III, 324/325–326/327); Geoffroy, c. 405–412 (ed. Faral, II, 216–227; transl. Fluieraru, 167–169); Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 528; FLHB IV, 13–14; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 39); Longnon 1949, 84–85; Hendrickx 1988, 45; Vásáry 2005, 51; Külzer 2008, 621; Dall’Aglio 2003da, 148–150; Dall’Aglio 2008–2009, 50; Simeonova 2011, 519–520.

tarrying in the villages near the City, frequently approached the walls to wage battle; at times, a few penetrated inside by way of the so-called gate of Saint Romanos to show off their bravery, or rather their good luck, which followed them in these actions. After killing the gates' defenders, they quickly withdrew and returned to their own country with all their forces, leading back their captives as though they were herds of cattle and driving flocks and beasts of burden as numerous as the stars.

After Rousion, the Vlachs and the Cumans took Apros (now Kermeyan or Germeyan), which Villehardouin calls Naples (Neapolis). After that, they move to Rhaidestos (Rodosto, now Tekirdağ), which they destroyed, much like Perinthos (Marmara Ereğlisi), Daonion (Eski Ereğli, between Marmara Ereğlisi and Silivri), and Tzurulos (Çorlu). They then moved towards Constantinople, not before plundering Athyra (Büyük Çekmece) as well, about 50 km from the capital. George Akropolites also mentions the destruction of Heraklea (Perinthos), Panion (Barbaros, south of Tekirdağ), Charioupolis, Makré (near Didymoteichon), Traianoupolis (now in Alexandroupolis), Klaudioupolis (near Komotini), Mosynopolis, and Peritheorion (between Xanthi and Komotini). All those strongholds are to the west from Constantinople, most of them on the *Via Egnatia* leading to Thessaloniki. According to Akropolites, their inhabitants were forcefully moved to the lands next to the Danube, where they settled in settlements named after the towns from which they came. This, apparently, was a symbolic retaliation for what Basil II had done to the Bulgarians. Johannitsa apparently got the nickname “the Roman-slayer,” much like Basil II had been known as the “Bulgar-slayer.”<sup>164</sup> The forceful movement of people from Macedonia to the lands between the Danube and the Stara Planina is also mentioned by John Staurakios.<sup>165</sup>

The purpose of the 1206 campaign was to devastate the environs of Constantinople. There is no evidence that Johannitsa intended to incorporate those lands into the Vlach-Bulgarian state, unlike the rest of Thrace and

164 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 13 (ed. Van Dieten, 629–631; transl. Magoulias, 344–346; FHDR III, 326/327–328/329); Geoffroy, c. 413–421 (ed. Faral, II, 226–235; transl. Fluieraru, 170–172); Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 23; transl. Macrides, 140; FHDR III, 400/401); Longnon 1949, 85; Vlachos 1970, 278–280; Prinzing 1972, 57–60; Asdracha 1976, 27, 100, 118, 119, 238; Ciobanu 1985, 166–167; Božilov 1985, 53; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 73; Soustal 1991, 309, 342, 370, 394, 483; Papacostea 1993, 20; Vásáry 2005, 52; Lazăr 2006, 21; Külzer 2008, 142, 257, 271, 308, 322, 402, 563, 609, 621, 685.

165 Ioannes Staurakios, c. 34 (ed. Iberites, 369; FGH B X, 129; FHDR IV, 94/95); Dall’Aglio 2002, 268.

Macedonia. Besides the destruction of fortifications and the capture of many people, Villehardouin mentions cattle as an important part of the booty. Why were people moved to the northern parts of the Balkan Peninsula? Johannitsa may have sought to repopulate the region between the Danube and the Haemus, which had previously been devastated by the Cuman invasions. A demographic growth can indeed be detected archaeologically in the early 13th century on many sites in the region, including Tärnovo.<sup>166</sup>

However, the unexpected result of the 1206 campaign was that the terrorized population went on the side of the Latins. Moreover, the establishment of the Byzantine Empire of Nicaea under Theodore I Laskaris (1204–1221) operated as a magnet for all Greeks in the lands occupied by the Latins, who now put all their hopes in the new empire. Their alliance with Bulgaria was no longer necessary, and the terms of the 1205 agreement between Johannitsa and the Greeks in the European area of the former empire had no application. That agreement had in fact been a last resort for desperate Greeks. The ferocity of the campaign in Thrace now drove the Greeks away from Johannitsa. Refugees from Philippopolis went to Adrianople and Didymoteichon, two cities that fearing the attacks of the Vlachs, the Bulgarians, and the Cumans, put themselves under the protection of Emperor Henry. In May or June 1206, the general Theodore Vranas, who had married the sister of the French King Philip Augustus, received those cities as appanages, at the request of their inhabitants, who hoped that by such means they would be spared the devastation. It appears that Theodore was even proclaimed king by the locals, much like Boniface of Montferrat. In short, in the aftermath of the 1206 campaign, many Greeks in the region pledged themselves to Emperor Henry and Theodore Vranas.<sup>167</sup>

The political landscape of the formerly Byzantine lands was therefore increasingly complicated. In Theodore Vranas, Johannitsa had now a new enemy, as he was a capable general, with two cities in southeastern Thrace on his side. The disappearance of popular support in Thrace for Johannitsa

166 Stanev 2013, 220–225.

167 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 13 (ed. Van Dieten, 627; transl. Magoulias, 344; FHDR III, 324/325); Geoffroy, c. 403, 422, 423, 442 (ed. Faral, II, 214–217, 234–237, 256–257; transl. Fluieraru, 166–167, 172–173, 178); Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 528; FLHB IV, 15; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 40); Longnon 1949, 85–86; Vasiliev 1958, 510–511; Nicol 1966, 293; Vlachos 1970, 280; Prinzing 1972, 61–63; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 55; Asdracha 1976, 239; Carile 1978, 235; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 72; Hendrickx 1988, 48; Cheynet 1990, 470–471; Soustal 1991, 103; Bendall, Morrisson 1994, 176–177; Fine 1994, 85; Treadgold 1997, 714–715; Van Tricht 2011, 159.

coincided in time with the dissolution of his military forces. Johannitsa put Didymoteichon under siege in June 1206, and ordered his men to deviate the river that supplied the citadel, in order to deprive the inhabitants of the city of water. Meanwhile, the ramparts were hit by no less than 16 siege machine, both *perrieres* and mangonels. The wall was broken in four places, but the city resisted until the arrival of Latin reinforcements. Johannitsa, fearing encirclement, abandoned the siege, set fire to the catapults and withdrew on June 28. Geoffroy de Villehardouin claims that Johannitsa had under his command 40,000 *homes a armes* (horsemen), in addition to an unknown number of infantrymen.<sup>168</sup>

He returned to Didymoteichon in August 1206, when he destroyed the city that had been abandoned by the Latin forces with no repair of the ramparts.<sup>169</sup> Soon after that, Johannitsa tried once again to take Adrianople. Emperor Henry learned on August 23, 1206, that Johannitsa had put the city under siege. He marched out of Constantinople with his army and managed to drive the enemy away. It is possible that Johannitsa withdrew without a fight because he did not expect a counterattack. In any case, Henry did not stop at Adrianople. After securing the city (from which he wrote to his brother in September), the emperor moved against Bulgaria:

Only the third day after our coronation, we heard that Johannitsa entered our country once more, and was besieging Adrianople with myriads of men. Hearing of this, we left the royal city with our army, although small. And as we approached the above-named citadel, the enemy of the Curia and the Holy Roman Church fled, abandoning the named citadel. After reclaiming it, we continued to pursue him throughout Bulgaria.<sup>170</sup>

168 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 14 (ed. Van Dieten, 632–633; transl. Magoulias, 346–347; FHDR III, 328/329–330/331); Geoffroy, c. 424–432 (ed. Faral, II, 236–247; transl. Fluieraru, 173–175); Brătianu 1980, 75; Longnon 1949, 86; Vlachos 1970, 280–281; Asdracha 1976, 40, 132; Iosipescu 1984, 306–307; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 75; Soustal 1991, 241; Fine 1994, 86; Vásáry 2005, 52; Van Tricht 2015, 332.

169 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 17 (ed. Van Dieten, 645; transl. Magoulias, 355; FHDR III, 334/335); Geoffroy, c. 442 (ed. Faral, II, 256–257; transl. Fluieraru, 178); Vlachos 1970, 281; Fine 1994, 86; Vásáry 2005, 53.

170 Henri de Hainaut, 1 (Brial, *Recueil*, 529; FLHB IV, 15–16; Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 42): “Sane die tertia post coronationem nostram, veraciter audivimus Iohannicum terram nostram iterata intrasse, et cum innumera populi multitudine Andrianopolim obsedissee. His auditis, cum exercitu nostro, modico tamen, regiam exivimus civitatem; et cum predictae civitati appropinquassemus, prenominate curie et sancte Romane ecclesie inimicus dictam civitatem

During the operations against Johannitsa that took place in September and October 1206 in the region north of Adrianople, Henry freed 20,000 prisoners taken by the Bulgarians. He moved to Krinos (Krän), north of Beroe (Stara Zagora), and headed to the coastline. First, he took and destroyed Thermopolis (Banevo, 15 km to the north-west from Burgas), and then Anchialos. Henry may have initially intended to cross the mountains through the Šipka Pass. However, the army moved east to strike at several Bulgarian ports. After that, the Latin army returned to Adrianople, leaving a small garrison behind.<sup>171</sup>

It is important to note that to Henry, Johannitsa was not just an enemy of the Latin Empire, but also an enemy of the Roman Church. It is possible that relations between Johannitsa and the pope had deteriorated because of the continued attacks of the Vlachs, the Bulgarians and the Cumans on the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Innocent III wanted to maintain at all price that Western polity in the East, even if that would have been at the cost of losing Johannitsa, whose claims against the Latin Empire and Hungary looked perfectly justified.

Nothing is known about what happened between November 1206 and March 1207. In spring, Johannitsa renewed his attacks, unwilling to give up his plan of conquering Adrianople. Theodore I Laskaris, the Greek emperor of Nicaea, must have spurred him into action. In February or March 1207, he proposed to Johannitsa a simultaneous attack on Constantinople, a city that had been left largely undefended. That alliance was natural, given that the Latin Empire of Constantinople was the enemy of both rulers. A large army of Vlachs, Cumans, and Bulgarians was mobilized, and it marched at first to the outskirts of Constantinople. Thirty-three large counterweight trebuchets (*perrieres granz*) were used for the siege of Adrianople in April 1207. The inhabitants of the city put up a heroic defense, permanently repairing the destruction inflicted by the siege machines to the ramparts. As a consequence, after a month the siege was lifted and the Cumans went back to their country.<sup>172</sup>

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fugiens quam citius dereliquit. Nos vero, in compositione presentium adhuc eum per Bulgariam insequebamur." See Longnon 1949, 86–87, 96–97; Nicol 1966, 294; Carile 1978, 235; Vásáry 2005, 52.

- 171 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 17 (ed. Van Dieten, 645–646; transl. Magoulias, 355; FHDR III, 334/335); Geoffroy, c. 443–452 (ed. Faral, II, 256–267; transl. Fluieraru, 178–181); Nicol 1966, 294; Vlachs 1970, 282; Carile 1978, 236; Božilov 1985, 54; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 75–76; Gagova 1986b, 199; Soustal 1991, 104, 176, 324, 477; Vásáry 2005, 52; Momčilov 2011, 334–338.
- 172 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 17 (ed. Van Dieten, 636; transl. Magoulias, 348–349); Geoffroy, c. 459, 461, 472–476 (ed. Faral, II, 274–277, 286–291; transl.

Learning about the alliance between the two sworn enemies of the Latin Empire, Innocent III wrote to Johannitsa on May 24, 1207, and asked him to make peace with Emperor Henry I of Hainaut. At the same time, the pope asked the Hungarian King Andrew II to allow his envoy safe passage through Hungary.<sup>173</sup> Nothing was accomplished in this regard. Instead, aware that he could fight simultaneously on two fronts in Europe and in Asia Minor, Emperor Henry agreed in July 1207 to conclude a two years truce with Theodore I Laskaris. This allowed him to resume the war against Johannitsa. He left Adrianople at the end of that same month, and after four days of march into the foothills of the mountains of Vlachia (“al pié de la montaigne de Blaquie”) he reached a stronghold named *Eului* or *Aulin*, which is otherwise mentioned in 11th-century sources as *Aule*. Its most probable location is near Gorno Aleksandrovo, on the road to the Värbitsa Pass, which opens access to Preslav. The inhabitants of the stronghold fled, and the Latin army captured rich spoils. The Latins then attempted to enter Vlachia, but the passes were well guarded by the Vlachs. Having suffered great losses, the Latins decided to go back to Adrianople.<sup>174</sup>

Shortly after his return to Adrianople, Emperor Henry began negotiations with Boniface of Montferrat for a joint campaign against Johannitsa (Boniface also accepted to become Henry’s vassal). That, however, never happened, because Boniface was killed on September 4 in Mosynopolis, on his way back from Kypsella, where he had the met with the emperor. Different sources report differently on this incident. Geoffroy de Villehardouin claims that local Bulgarians, who took advantage of the fact that the marquis had only a few soldiers with him, ambushed Boniface. Having killed Boniface, they allegedly sent his head to Johannitsa. According to Niketas Choniates, the *Chronicle*

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Fluieraru, 183, 184, 187, 188); *Regesten*, III, 2 (n. 1673); Longnon 1949, 98; Nicol 1966, 295; Vlachos 1970, 282; Prinzing 1972, 78–79; Primov 1975, 62–63; Božilov 1985, 54; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 76; Papacostea 1993, 20–21; Fine 1994, 87; Mărculeț 2004, 102; Vásáry 2005, 52; Spinei 2006, 420–421; Curta 2006, 384; Purton 2009, 335.

173 PL, vol. 215, 1162 (n. LXV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 55–56 (doc. XL) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 332 (nr. 102) = FLHB III, 370–371; Tăutu 1975, 209–210; Papacostea 1993, 30; Mălinaș 2000, 168; Dall’Aglia 2003a, 153–155.

174 Geoffroy, c. 488–494 (ed. Faral, II, 302–309; transl. Fluieraru, 192–193); Longnon 1949, 99; Ostrogorsky 1956, 451; Vlachos 1970, 282; Van Dieten 1971, 148–149; Carile 1978, 236; Soustal 1991, 185; Dall’Aglia 2008–2009, 51. The old hypothesis of Tomaschek 1886, 320 (Goloe) was also mentioned by Ciobanu 1985, 160 (Vergatti 2003, 75). Lazăr 2005, 9 does not know the identification proposed by Soustal for Eului. According to the most recent studies, the fortification was in Terziysko, at a distance of 8 km from Gorno Aleksandrovo (Momčilov 2011, 338–339).

of *Morea*, and Robert de Clari, it was Johannitsa himself who had set up the ambush, for he had just sent an army of Vlachs and Cumans in the direction of Mosynopolis. He caught word that Boniface happened to be in the area, and decided to send 200 archers on horseback (most likely Cumans). Indeed, like many of his soldiers, an arrow killed Boniface. Although all three accounts seem to be based on what really happened (as opposed to Villehardouin's version), they have nothing to say about what happened with the body of the marquis.<sup>175</sup>

After killing the king of Thessalonica, Johannitsa moved against the city, in which the widow Margaret was regent for her underage son, Demetrios. The city had fallen prey to the well-organized attack of the Normans in 1185, and Johannitsa probably thought that it would fall to him as well. Neither Villehardouin, nor Choniates mention the siege of September–October 1207, and George Akropolites only noted that Johannitsa died there, without giving any account of the siege. Robert de Clari briefly speaks about the Vlachs and Cumans led by Johannitsa who besieged Thessalonica with siege engines (*engiens*).<sup>176</sup> The only sources dealing in detail with the siege are two hagiographic texts about the miracles of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki, which were written by John Staurakios and Constantine Akropolites, respectively. Staurakios's account is the most reliable, both because it is older and because the author was a resident of Thessaloniki. Nevertheless, the comparison of his text with that of Constantine Akropolites is instructive. John Staurakios lists several categories of fighters: spearmen, bowmen, mace throwers, slingers. He mentions Bulgarians (with Johannitsa as their lord), Scythians (Cumans), Romaioi (Byzantines from Thrace), as well as Khazars, Rus' and Alans.<sup>177</sup> However, there are no Vlachs in Staurakios's description of the army besieging the city. The presence of the Rus' should not surprise, as this

175 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 17 (ed. Van Dieten, 636; transl. Magoulias, 349); Geoffroy, c. 495–499 (ed. Faral, II, 302–314; transl. Fluieraru, 193–195); Robert de Clari, c. 116 (ed. Lauer, 107; transl. Fluieraru, 172); *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 1051–1081 (Camariano 1944, 355, 359; ed. Lurier, 98; Shawcross 2009, 339, 343–344; FHDR IV, 166/167); Longnon 1949, 99; Wolff 1969, 205; Vlachos 1970, 282–283; Hansen-Löwe 1971, 104, 111; Prinzing 1972, 81–82; Primov 1975, 62–63; Božilov 1977a, 51–52; Carile 1978, 236–237; Božilov 1985, 55; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 77; Fine 1994, 87; Kyriakidis 2013, 45.

176 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 23–24; transl. Macrides, 140; FHDR III, 400/401–402/403); Robert de Clari, c. 116 (ed. Lauer, 107–108; transl. Fluieraru, 172). He used the same term for the engines used to bring down the walls of Constantinople: Robert de Clari, c. 69 (ed. Lauer, 69; transl. Fluieraru, 126). For this type of engines, see Hanley 2003, 57.

177 The *Albanoi* in the text are not Albanians, but Caucasian Alans, the allies of the Cumans (Krāstev 1997, 127–128). Constantine Akropolites also mentions the Alans.

was an army of mercenaries with large numbers of Cumans from the steppe lands in southern Russia. Much more problematic is the mention of the Khazars, who are last documented Tmutarakan in 1083.<sup>178</sup> The commander of the mercenary army was Manastras. He set up camp on the Gallikos River, to the west from the city. Another army under the command of Johannitsa came to Langada, to the northeast from Thessaloniki. When the two armies merged, John Staurakios counted 10,000 men. The attack on the city came from the northern side.<sup>179</sup>

Manastras was the commander of an army made up of mercenaries. He must have been Johannitsa's ally, not his subordinate.<sup>180</sup> Robert de Clari also draws a distinction between the Cumans and Johannitsa's troops. Staurakios does not indicate Manastras's ethnic background, but various historians believe that he was a Cuman.<sup>181</sup> This, of course, is quite possible, especially another commander of mercenary troops in the Byzantine army under Alexios I Comnenos, was named Michael Monastras. Anna Comnena claims that he knew the language of the Turks and that he was "mixobarbarian," i.e., he came from a region between civilization and barbarism (possibly the Paradunavon theme). Monastras was the commander of some of the troops that defeated the Pechenegs at Lebounion (1091) and defended the mountain passes in the battles of 1095 against the Cumans. In 1103 he was duke of Cilicia.<sup>182</sup> His are five seals discovered in Bulgaria, which identify him as Michael Manastras or Monastras, *protovestis*.<sup>183</sup> He must have been either of Pecheneg or of Cuman descent, but most certainly a Christian. Therefore, it is indeed possible that the commander who participated in the 1207 siege of Thessaloniki was not only Cuman, but also the descendent of the Michael Manastras. Nothing is known about the etymology of the name, which also appears in a 1300 document

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178 Petrukhin 2001, 118.

179 Ioannes Staurakios, c. 34 (ed. Iberites, 369–370; FGHB X, 129; FHDR IV, 94/95); Dall'Aglia 2002, 268–269.

180 Kráštef 1997, 129.

181 Zlatarski 1972, 111, 260; Prinzing 1972, 84–85; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 78; Vásáry 2005, 53; Spinei 2006, 421–422; Spinei 2009, 145; Mărculeț 2010b, 289.

182 Anna Comnena, VII. 9. 7; 10. 2; VIII. 5.5; X. 2. 7; 4. 10; XI. 2. 7–10; 9. 4; 11. 5; XII. 2. 1; XIV. 3. 1; 5. 7 (ed. Leib, 11, 120, 121, 141, 194, 204; III, 14–16, 41, 48, 49, 56, 154, 169; transl. Sewter, 240–241, 257, 299, 306, 338–340, 359, 365, 371, 445, 455; FHDR III, 114/115); Moravcsik 1958, 11, 192; Skoulatos 1980, 213–215; Stephenson 2000, 109.

183 Jordanov 2006, 269–271 (nr. 415–419).



concerning the village Brasta (now Vrasna) in the Rentina katepanate, about 80 km to the west from Thessaloniki.<sup>184</sup>

After the moat in front of the ramparts of Thessaloniki was filled, troops were placed in front of the towers, each equipped with two ladders. The plan was to launch a coordinated attack from multiple directions, and the author states that it would have been successful, because there were few defenders. Constantine Akropolites' text mentions the use of trebuchets (*helepolis*), probably the same ones briefly mentioned by Robert de Clari.<sup>185</sup>

The siege failed, however, because of Johannitsa's death. According to Robert de Clari, Saint Demeter slew him with a spear while he was asleep in his tent. After that, the Vlachs and the Cumans lifted the siege.<sup>186</sup> Soon after the event, a legend emerged, about which Robert de Clari learned at some point before 1216.<sup>187</sup> The miracle is also mentioned in the *vita* of Stephen Nemanja written in 1216 by his son, Stephen the First-Crowned.<sup>188</sup> Somewhat later, but before 1241 when he finished his chronicle, Albericus reported on the killing of Johannitsa, the king of Bulgaria, by St. Demetrius ("De Iohannicio rege Bulgarie audivimus quod, cum iret contra Thessalonicam, a beato Demetrio fuit interfectus").<sup>189</sup> John Staurakios extensively developed the theme of the miracle. Apparently, Johannitsa's intention, upon taking the city, was to destroy the church of Saint Demeter and to build a bigger one. His punishment came during the night before the planned attack. Riding on a white horse, St. Demetrius speared Johannitsa, who was convinced that the attacker was Manastras, who also had a white horse. When he was accused of having murdered Johannitsa, Manastras fled with his army, while Johannitsa died from his wounds several hours later. The city was thus delivered from a great danger because of the intervention of Saint Demetrius. Constantine Akropolites's account is basically the same.<sup>190</sup> According to the *vita* of Saint Sava of Serbia, which was written by Theodosie of Hilandar in 1292, Johannitsa's embalmed body was

184 Lefort 1973, 69, 129; Božilov 1985, 67. With no arguments whatsoever, Mălinaş 2000, 171 believes that the real name was Mănăstir, and that the man was a Vlach.

185 Ioannes Staurakios, c. 34 (ed. Iberites, 370–371; FGHB X, 129–130); Constantine Akropolites, c. 63 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameos, 211); Dall'Aglia 2002, 269–270, 274.

186 Robert de Clari, c. 116 (ed. Lauer, 108; transl. Fluieraru, 172).

187 Markov 2008, 27–28.

188 Stephen Nemanja, 117.

189 Albericus, ed. Pertz, 886 (FLHB IV, 183).

190 Ioannes Staurakios, c. 35 (ed. Iberites, 371–372; FGHB X, 131–132); Constantine Akropolites, c. 63–64 (ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameos, 211–212); Dujčev 1935, 134–137; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 253–261, 581–587; Dall'Aglia 2002, 270–271, 274–275; Lapina 2009, 110.

taken to Tărnovo. The older version of the *vita* written by Domentian in 1254 has nothing of the sort, and only mentions Saint Demeter slaying Johannitsa.<sup>191</sup> George Akropolites, however, although he knew that some believed in Saint Demetrius's intervention, claimed that Johannitsa had in fact died of pleurisy.<sup>192</sup> However, the legend would not have emerged so quickly after the event if Johannitsa's death had not been violent.<sup>193</sup>

The significance of the legend, on the other hand, is worth underlining. Saint Demetrius, who, according to Vlach and Bulgarian beliefs, had abandoned Thessaloniki because of the sins of the Byzantines, and moved to Tărnovo in 1185 to support the rebels, now returned to defend his beloved city against the brother of one of those rebels.<sup>194</sup> Although no source gives the date of his death, many believe Johannitsa was killed on October 26, the feast day of St. Demetrius.<sup>195</sup>

The miracle is represented in several Orthodox churches. The most famous is that from Dečani Monastery in Serbia, painted around 1350 (scene 12). Saint Demetrius strikes Johannitsa (Kaloian), who is about to fall off his horse, with his spear. The scene is also depicted in later, 15th- to 17th-century mural paintings in the churches of Krokeia (Laconia), Morača (Montenegro), Temska (Serbia), as well as in the church dedicated to the Mother of God in Dragalevtsi, near Sofia.<sup>196</sup> There is also a beautiful 13th-century icon originating from the church of Saint George in Prizren, in which Johannitsa (who is otherwise not identified by name) wears a crown.<sup>197</sup> The Dragalevtsi fresco is truly remarkable. The monastery built there by Tsar Ivan Alexander in the mid-14th century was completely destroyed by the Ottomans, and another church was built in its place in 1476, and dedicated to the Mother of God. The upper reaches of the western façade have images of the military saints George, Demetrius and Mercurius, just above the entrance. Although the church is Bulgarian, the person slain by Saint Demetrius, who is depicted in accordance to tradition, is identified as *Tsar Skaloyan*, the pejorative name given to Johannitsa by

191 Domentian, 209; Teodosije Hilandarac, 103–104; Zlatarski 1972, III, 258; Prinzing 1972, 83; Dujčev 1975, 181–182; Dall'Aglio 2002, 279.

192 Akropolites, c. 13 (ed. Heisenberg, 23–24; transl. Macrides, 140; FHDR III, 400/401–402/403). Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 460; FGHB VIII, 265–266; FHDR III, 436/437) mentions both versions.

193 Both Wolff 1969, 205 and Dujčev 1975, 180–181 accepted Akropolites's explanation.

194 Obolensky 1974, 19.

195 Not on 8 October (the date of the saint's feast in the Western church), as wrongly assumed by several authors.

196 Radovanović 1987, 87–88; Walter 2003, 87–89.

197 Petrović 2003.

his Byzantine enemies who called him “John the dog” (*Skyloioannes*).<sup>198</sup> The name *Scaluan* also appears in the depiction of the miracle in a fresco from the Sucevița Monastery in northern Moldavia (Romania), probably because of Bulgarian influence.<sup>199</sup>

Manastras may well have been the killer, and there can be no surprise that the legend of Saint Demetrius killing Johannitsa emerged so quickly, given that the saint had a long established reputation of protecting his city from invasions and raids. It can also be no doubt that Thessaloniki was not seriously affected by the attack of September-October 1207, for the army must have withdrawn soon after the death of Johannitsa. We can only speculate on the reasons of this murder. The fact that Manastras did not continue the siege, but withdrew, suggests that he was not interested in usurping Johannitsa’s power. He may have acted in connivance with conspirators from Tărnovo led by the son of Johannitsa’s sister, Boril and Johannitsa’s Cuman wife, whom Boril married after the murder. Manastras’ army may have been used to impose the new tsar.<sup>200</sup> Villehardouin and Henri de Valenciennes regarded Boril as a traitor who had crowned himself emperor against God’s will.<sup>201</sup> Emperor Henry I of Hainaut also knew that Boril “had imposed his will by violence and usurped the imperial name and insignia” (“per violentiam se praeposuit, imperiale nomen sibi cum singulis signis imperialibus usurpaverat”).<sup>202</sup> Henry’s testimony is a strong argument in favor of the idea that Boril may have been involved in the assassination of Johannitsa. As a matter of fact, there has been another attempt to overthrow Johannitsa in mid-1205.<sup>203</sup> According to another theory, the advocates of which are Genoveva Cankova-Petkova and Francesco Dall’Aglia, Manastras acted at the behest of the Byzantines, who were eager to eliminate their worst enemy.<sup>204</sup> However, Johannitsa’s worst enemies at the moment of

198 Tăpkova-Zaimova 1987, 142–143; Džidrova 2001, 192, 194, 207; Lapina 2009, 110.

199 Golescu 1937, 30.

200 Jireček 1876, 242; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 260–261; Longnon 1949, 100; Vacalopoulos 1963, 48; Vlachos 1970, 283; Prinzing 1972, 85; Carile 1978, 237; Božilov 1985, 54–55; A. P. Kazhdan, C. Brand, *Kalojan*, in ODB, II, 1095; Fine 1994, 91; Krăstev 1997, 129; Vásáry 2005, 52; Spinei 2006, 422; Spinei 2009, 145; Mărculeț 2010b, 289–290; Lazăr 2010, 15.

201 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 528 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 320–321; ed. Longnon, 40; trad. Fluieraru, 39).

202 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 531 = FLHB IV, 18 = Prinzing 1973, 411; Henri de Valenciennes, c. 528 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 320, 321; ed. Longnon, 40; trad. Fluieraru, 39); Brezeanu 1978, 262–263; Djurić 1980, 35.

203 Niketas Choniates, *Following the fall of Constantinople*, 13 (ed. Van Dieten, 628; transl. Magoulias, 344; FHDR III, 324–325); Prinzing 1972, 85; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 54; Fine 1994, 85.

204 Cankova-Petkova 1976, 56; Dall’Aglia 2002, 278–280.

his death were not the Byzantines, but the Latins. He had been an ally of the emperor of Nicaea.

The whereabouts of Johannitsa's grave, or even its very existence, remained for a long while unknown. In 1972, a grave (no. 39) was discovered near the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs in Tărnovo. Among the grave goods was a golden sigillar finger-ring (61.75 grams, 23.7 carats), the bezel of which was decorated with an animal (probably a panther) in the center.<sup>205</sup> There is also a Cyrillic inscription, which reads "The finger-ring of Kaloian" (*Kaloianov prăsten*). In addition to the ring, garment buttons have also been found preserved. The associated skeleton was that of a male, 1.90 m tall. On the basis of the skull, the Bulgarian anthropologist Jordan Jordanov later reconstructed the facial features of the man. The estimated age at death was 35–40 years. This discovery caused great commotion, primarily because of the inscription on the ring mentioning Kaloian, whom Ivan Dujčev promptly identified with the emperor. It was assumed that Johannitsa had been interred first somewhere else and then his remains moved to the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs, which was built in 1230 (see Chapter 8).<sup>206</sup> The remains thus attributed to Johannitsa were reburied with military honors on April 18, 2007, after being the subject of another anthropological study, just to make sure that the identification was correct. The Bulgarian president Georgi Părvanov attended the religious service celebrated by Bishop Gregory of Tărnovo, and the regional museum in town organized a commemorative exhibition.<sup>207</sup>

However, further investigation challenged the identification of those remains. A key argument was the dating of the finger-ring, all analogies of which are dated to the 14th century. Konstantin Totev has brought this argument to the fore in a study published three years after the official burial of the remains believed to be Johannitsa's. To be sure, it is surprising that the inscription on the finger-ring that supposedly belongs to Johannitsa did not mention his imperial title. That was the reason for which Ivan Dujčev, who must have been uncomfortable with his own identification, dated the inscription (and therefore the ring) to the period before Kaloian became tsar. According to Dujčev, Johannitsa was so fond of the ring that he continued to wear it until

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205 Poutiers 1979.

206 Válov 1974; Dujčev 1975, 174–178; Popov 1984, 54–55; Božilov 1985, 43, 56, 57; Teoteoi 1989, 90–91.

207 [http://www.novinite.com/view\\_news.php?id=79532](http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=79532); <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NHMB-Anthrological-reconstruction-of-the-head-of-Tsar-Kaloyan-by-Prof.Yordan-Yordanov.jpg>.

his death, which is of course implausible. Even more doubts were raised on the basis of the archaeological observations of the excavator. There are of course imperial graves in the church—both of tsars, and of members of their families. But they are all inside, not outside the church. The grave with the finger-ring of Kaloian was in a simple pit, without sarcophagus, in the courtyard of the church erected in 1230. The grave must be of another Kaloian, who died in the late 14th century.<sup>208</sup> Where Johannitsa was buried remains to this day unknown, much like the location of his brothers' tombs.

During Johannitsa's ten-year reign, Tărnovo became a true capital, the residence of both emperor and archbishop resided, both of whom derived their authority from the pope. Beginning with the fall of 1204, Johannitsa was equal to all other Christian rulers. The events following his death, however, clearly revealed the ephemeral character of his power.<sup>209</sup> Johannitsa ruled over several local leaders. His chrysobull of September 8, 1203, mentions his loyalty with Rome, along with that of "other princes of my empire" (*alii imperii mei principes*).<sup>210</sup> One of those "princes" was Bellota, whose Vlach name may have been Balotă. He wrote to the pope in 1202 to express his loyalty to the Church of Rome. Some have assumed that Bellota ruled somewhere in the northwest, along the road that the papal envoys used to reach Tărnovo, since Bellota mentions Dominic passing through his lands (*per nos transierit*).<sup>211</sup> Other "princes" may have been those commanders whom Johannitsa appointed in 1203–1205 to rule over Kritsuva (Vranas), Prosakos (Šišman), Verroia, Tzepaina and Melnik (for the latter two, see Chapter 7).

208 Totev 2010, 27, 47, 67, 79, 113–115. Several scholars have previously questioned Dujčev's idea, and suggested that Kaloian was a high-ranking official of 13th- to 14th-century Bulgaria. See Sotirov 1992; Atanasov 1999, 137–146; Malingoudis 1979, 105–106; Jordanov 2001a, 139–140.

209 Diaconu, Ștefănescu 2001, 434 claim that a well established administration was in existence from the very beginning of the Second Bulgarian Empire, but offer no evidence in support of their claims.

210 PL, vol. 215, 288 (n. IV) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 27 (doc. XVIII) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 252 (no. 49) = FLHB III, 335. Onciul 1968, I, 418, 610 believed this to be a proof of vassal principalities in the lands north of the Danube.

211 PL, vol. 214, 1116, 1118 (n. CXVIII, CXX) = Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 7 (doc. VI, VII) = *Acta Innocentii III*, 230–231 (no. 31), 600 = FLHB III, 315, 317; Zlatarski 1972, III, 160–161; Tăutu 1975, 235; Hintner 1976, 75; Božilov 1977b; Iambor 1980, 169; Biliarsky 1999, 193; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 57, 64–65 (who prefers to regard him as a Hungarian magnate); Petkov 2008, 221.

The empire experienced the same centrifugal tendencies that had manifested themselves in the Byzantine Empire, and had made possible the rebellion of 1185. New local rulers like those subject to Johannitsa at the beginning of his rule, owners of fortified towns, gradually separated from the central power, often in cooperation with the Latin Empire and with Serbia. The conspiracies against Johannitsa (the first failed, but the second succeeded) must be understood from the perspective of his limited authority over various groups of aristocrats, those who commanded the troops and who controlled important strongholds.<sup>212</sup>

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212 Fine 1994, 92: "Great war chiefs like Kalojan, having subdued or won the loyalty of a sufficient number of these local warlords, were then able to force the rest into the fold. But after gaining their submission, Kalojan, like other great medieval war chiefs, created no apparatus or bureaucracy to retain control of them. Thus, little state control existed over the boyars, be it from state officials or from an independent state army; for the army continued to be made up chiefly of regional units, each composed of a major boyar leading his own local retinue."

## Boril (1207–1218)

After Johannitsa's death, the power was taken by Boril, the son of one of the former emperor's sisters. Asan had two sons, John and Alexander, both minors, but Johannitsa had none. John, who at that time was about 14–15 years old, could have become emperor under the regency of his mother, but she preferred to marry Boril. In other words, although Johannitsa's nephew usurped the title of emperor, which rightfully belonged to Asan's son, Boril could legitimately claim power as a family member and as the new husband of the empress. Very little information regarding the succession to the throne got to the Byzantines and Latins. One can only speculate about the chain of events. If Albericus is right about the behavior of this Cuman empress, namely that she had already thought about cheating on Johannitsa with Baldwin in 1205, then it is quite possible that she entertained ideas about a conspiracy. The fact that John had to flee the country and seek refuge in the Rus' principality of Halych (or in Kiev) shows that he had reasons to fear for his life. In 1207, the Rus's were enemies of the Cumans, while Boril maintained the alliance with the nomads. If Manastras killed Johannitsa as a result of Boril's plot, then the new regime may have well represented a pro-Cuman group. Asan's son fleeing to the Rus' was only natural under such circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Boril's official title was Emperor of the Bulgarians, as indicated by two identical seals with the inscription *Borilŭ tsar Blăgaromŭ* discovered in the stronghold at Belotintsi, in the Belogradchik region, and near the southern gate of Preslav. The iconography on those seals imitates that of Asan's seal: the emperor with diadem and a cross in the right hand. This was no doubt meant to emphasize dynastic continuity, an issue of great concern for an usurper. On the obverse, Boril's seal bear the image of Saint Demetrius.<sup>2</sup> That the name

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- 1 Robert de Clari, c. 116 (ed. Lauer, 108; transl. Fluieraru, 172); Akropolites, c. 13, 20 (ed. Heisenberg, 24, 33; transl. Macrides, 140, 161; FHDR III, p. 402/403); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 460; FGHB VIII, p. 266; FHDR III, 438/439); Henri de Valenciennes, c. 506 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 308, 309; ed. Longnon, 30; trad. Fluieraru, 32); Albericus, ed. Pertz, 886 (FLHB IV, 183); Zlatarski 1972, III, 260–261; Longnon 1949, 100; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 56–57; Carile 1978, 237; Dujčev 1980, 116–117; Božilov 1985, 69, 77; Fine 1994, 91–92; Vásáry 2005, 57; Spinei 2006, 422; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 51; Mărculeț 2009b, 308–310; Mărculeț 2010b, 290; Dall'Aglio 2013, 311.
  - 2 Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 104; Atanasov 1999, 146–147; Jordanov 2001a, 105, nr. 155, 156; Žekova 2004, 347; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 45.

in the inscription has a big ier letter (Ѣ) at the end suggests that it was pronounced *Borilǎ*, as in Romanian. Both manuscripts of the *Synodikon* have the name *Boril* ending in the small ier (Ѣ), but those are much later texts.<sup>3</sup> George Akropolites has Βορίλλας.<sup>4</sup> Western sources have a variety of names: *Burus* at Robert de Clari,<sup>5</sup> *Burile* or *Burille* at Henri de Valenciennes,<sup>6</sup> *Borilus* at Henry I of Hainaut,<sup>7</sup> and *Burillus* at Albericus.<sup>8</sup> Of all those sources, the most relevant is the seal, because it had an official character. The actual name of the emperor was therefore *Borilǎ*, not *Boril* (although I will continue to use the Anglicized form, for the sake of clarity).

A study of personal names in Macedonian medieval villages has shown that both *Asanes* and *Borilas* were relatively common names in the 13th and 14th centuries, particularly in the village of Pangée, to the east from Serrai.<sup>9</sup> More people named Βορίλας or Βορίλος are mentioned in other settlements in the environs of Serrai in 1316, 1323, 1327, and 1341.<sup>10</sup> In addition to those names, all of them from an area with a strong Vlach population that was for a while under the rule of Dobromir Chrysos, there is also a character named *Borilos* in Byzantine history. In March 1078, Nikephoros Botaneiates was proclaimed emperor in Nicaea. Moving to Constantinople, he sent one of his trusted man to occupy the palace on his behalf. That man's name was *Borilos*, and he asked the Grand Domestic Alexios Comnenos to turn to him Nikephoros Bryennios, another general who had claimed the throne. When Alexios organized the coup of 1081, *Borilos* organized a Varangian and Cuman guard around the palace. Nikephoros Bryennios called him Scythian or Mysian, and so did also Anna Comnena.<sup>11</sup> The late 11th-century *Borilos* is also known from two

3 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 79–80; Butler 1996, 212; Petkov 2008, 254–255; Stankov 2015, 363.

4 Akropolites, c. 13, 20 (ed. Heisenberg, 24, 33; transl. Macrides, 140, 161; FHDR III, 402/403).

5 Robert de Clari, c. 116, 117 (ed. Lauer, 108; transl. Fluieraru, 172–173).

6 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 501, 505, 506, 526, 619, 686 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 304, 305, 308, 309, 319, 320, 376, 377, 416, 417; ed. Longnon, 27–30, 39, 85, 117; trad. Fluieraru, 30–32, 38, 71, 93).

7 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 530–532 = FLHB IV, 18, 20, 23 = Prinzing 1973, 411–414, 417, 418).

8 Albericus, ed. Pertz, 886 (FLHB IV, 183).

9 Lefort 1992, 171.

10 PLP, 2, 1977, no. 2982–2989.

11 Nikephor Bryennios, 146–147 (IV. 16, 17); Anna Comnena, I. 7. 1; I. 16. 3; II. 1.3 (ed. Leib, I, 28, 58, 64; transl. Sewter, 46, 69–70, 73; FHDR III, 98/99); Bănescu 1943, 22–26; Ostrogorsky 1956, 370–371; Skoulatos 1980, 47–49.



seals, according to which he had the title of *proedros* and his rank of *meġas primikerios ton ethnikon* (commander of the mercenaries).<sup>12</sup>

Mátyás Gyóni believed Borilos to have been Bulgarian, but had to make exception with Anna Comnena's usage of Scythians, a name that she does not regularly apply to Bulgarians. More often than not, Anna Comnena's Scythians are either Pechenegs or Cumans.<sup>13</sup> More important, in my opinion, is the fact that Borilos is also called *Mysian*. In the 11th century, a Scythian who was also a Mysian could only be a member of the Pecheneg population in the former Moesia (Paradunavon). Since Nikephoros Botaneiates was duke of Paradunavon between 1062 and 1065,<sup>14</sup> it is possible that he met Borilos in that theme. If Borilos was a Pecheneg, he could therefore have been one of those Pechenegs, who had converted to Christianity in Paradunavon in 1045–1047.<sup>15</sup>

Whether he was a Pecheneg or a Cuman, Borilos's name was not Turkic.<sup>16</sup> Vasil Zlatarski suggested (but without any arguments) that the 11th-century Borilos was related to the Asanids, perhaps as a member of an aristocratic Bulgarian family.<sup>17</sup> But the evidence of Nikephoros Bryennios's testimony suggests instead that Borilos was a slave, whom Nikephoros Botaneiates had bought with money. Thus, as Nicolae Bănescu has pointed out, Borilos could not have a member of an aristocratic family. Ivan Božilov also maintained that Borilos was Bulgarian,<sup>18</sup> but Phaedon Malingoudis strongly refuted his arguments. The Greek Byzantinist has shown that Nikephoros Bryennios never uses archaic terms for Bulgarians. Malingoudis also clarified the Slavic origin of the name, the Serbian variant of which is *Borilo*. As such, the name derives from the Slavic verb *boriti*, "to fight."<sup>19</sup> A Pecheneg with a name of Slavic origin suggests a bi- or multi-lingual context. Both Bulgarians and Romanians have anthroponyms ending with the suffix *-ilă* (Dănilă, Vintilă, Chirilă, Bădilă). Malingoudis cites the example of a Cuman named Volkanos, a name derived from *vlk*, "wolf." Conversely, both Romanians and Bulgarians took Pecheneg or Cuman names, of which Asan is the most famous. Since on the basis of his seal, the name of Johannitsa's nephew was without doubt Borilă, not Boril or Borilo, his may well have been a Vlach, and not a Bulgarian name.

12 Guiland 1967, I, 312, 320, 394.

13 Gyóni 1943–1944, 71–72.

14 Madgearu 2013a, 69–77.

15 Madgearu 2013a, 122–127.

16 Pace Nikolov 2005, 229, who believes the name to be Cuman.

17 Zlatarski 1972, II, 166.

18 Božilov 1978, 116, 117, 120.

19 Malingoudis 1981, 262–264.

The exclusion of Vlachia from Boril's official title substantiates Petre P. Panaitescu's hypothesis, according to which the conspiracy against Johannitsa, which was led by Boril, accelerated the "replacement of the mountaineer Vlach element with Bulgarian landlords." With that, "the social transformation of the state gave the second Bulgarian Empire its definitive Bulgarian nature."<sup>20</sup>

Boril's first military action was a continuation of those undertaken by Johannitsa. Information about it may be found in the chronicle of Henry de Valenciennes and the letter that Emperor Henry I of Hainaut sent to several kings and great noblemen to inform them about the events taking place between 1208 and 1212 (the letter is dated January 13, 1213, and not 1212 as long believed by many).<sup>21</sup> Following Johannitsa's death, Greek aristocrats in Eastern Thrace joined the Latin Empire. On May 25, 1208 news arrived in Constantinople that their lands had once again been attacked by the Cumans and Vlachs. Emperor Henry gathered his army and marched to Selymbria, where he pitched camp. From there, the Latin army moved to Adrianople, facing attacks from the marauders. After a stop at Adrianople, Henry decided to attack Vlachia (*Blaquie*) in order to give assistance to *Esclas*, *Burille's* cousin. *Burille* had apparently stripped *Esclas* of some of his lands. The purpose of the expedition was therefore to punish *Burille*.<sup>22</sup>

*Esclas* is of course Slav, the other son of Johannitsa's sister. He may have attempted to gain power after the death of Johannitsa, for he had a claim just as good as that of his cousin Boril. Instead, he became the ruler of a small, independent principality in the Rhodopi Mountains, much like Ivanko before him. His first residence was in Tzepaina (Tsepina), a stronghold located about 60 km west of Philippopolis and 45 km west of Kritzimos. Later, Slav occupied Melnik in the Pirin Mountains, on the Struma (see Map 6).<sup>23</sup> In 1208, one of Boril's military commander, named Vladimir (Henry de Valenciennes calls him *bailliu*) lived in Melnik.<sup>24</sup> That town city, which had been built on an almost

20 Panaitescu 1969, 223.

21 The demonstration was made by Van Tricht 2001, 221–227.

22 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 504–506 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 306–309; ed. Longnon, 28–30; trad. Fluieraru, 31–32); Longnon 1949, 103; Dujčev 1968, 31–32; Carile 1978, 238; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 81–82; Ciobanu 1985, 169; Gagova 1986b, 200; Fine 1994, 93; Spinei 2006, 424.

23 Some historians wrongly assumed that Slav had from the beginning his residence in Melnik (Jireček 1876, 243; Dujčev 1968, 30–31; Wolff 1969, 205; Schmitt 1989, 39; Curta 2006, 364, 385).

24 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 619 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 376, 377; ed. Longnon, 85; trad. Fluieraru, 71); Zlatarski 1972, III, 284; Tsončev 1959, 286; Dujčev 1968, 34 (who was wrong to treat him as one and the same as Slav); Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 94; Božilov 1985, 70; Fine 1994, 97; Andreev 1999; Nikolov 2012, 418; Gagova 2013, 268.



MAP 6 *The areas controlled by Boril, Slav and Strez.*

unassailable location, must have come under Bulgarian rule as a result of the 1195 campaign. The move from Tzepaina to Melnik is mentioned in Slav's donation charter of January 1220 for the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God, which he had himself erected and which would later become a metropolitan see. Slav also rebuilt the church of Saint Nicholas in Melnik and established another monastery nearby, at Rožen. His residence, an edifice with two levels and a private chapel, has survived in town.<sup>25</sup>

One of the few studies written in Romania about Boril and Slav contains an inexplicable error (that error appears in all the three versions in which the study was published). Radu Ștefan Ciobanu, currently Vergatti, claims that, according to George Akropolites, Slav's Vlachia was independent.<sup>26</sup> There is no such passage in Akropolites (the reference—FGHB VIII, pp. 159–160—is wrong). He may have mistaken this passage with another from the following chapter, which deals with the conquering of Great Vlachia (in Thessaly) by

25 Bompaire, Lefort, Kravari, Giros 2001, 119–128 (nr. 12, 13); Zlatarski 1972, III, 272, 273; Dujčev 1968, 30–36; Prinzing 1972, 101; Pljakov 1973, 186–187; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 89; Božilov 1985, 95–98; Ciobanu 1985, 170; Teoteoi 1989, 90; Soustal 1991, 104, 488; Božilov 2005, 80–82; Neševa 2005, 313–316; Petkov 2008, 478–481; Mărculeț 2009b, 314–317; Angelov 2011, 102. The sigillary ring with the inscription *Slav stolnik tsarev* belongs to another Slav who lived much later (Jordanov 2001a, 141–142; Totev 2010, 107–108).

26 Ciobanu 1985, 170, 171.

John Asan II in 1230.<sup>27</sup> It is important to remember at this point that George Akropolites has no Vlachs participating in the rise or development of the Asanid state, and he only recognized the Vlachia of Thessaly. Slav, on the other hand, challenged Boril's authority, probably pointing to him being an usurper. According to George Akropolites

Now this Sthlavos, to draw the account out a little, having found the fortress of Melenikon strong and impregnable to practically all adversaries, was independent and was subject to none of the surrounding rulers. Sometimes he was an ally of the Italians, joining with them because of his relationship by marriage; at other times, of the Bulgarians, uniting with them because of kinship; at other times, of Theodore Comnenos [the prince of Epirus, Theodore Comnenos Dukas, 1215–1230]. He was never subordinate to anyone nor did he join with anyone in good faith and agreement.<sup>28</sup>

Emperor Henry I of Hainaut intended to help Slav become emperor, so that he would have an ally in Bulgaria. It is obvious that the target of the Latin expedition was the Bulgarian capital, because Boril intercepted it at Beroe, on the way to the Riš pass. Henry was forced to abandon his camp at Beroe and to withdraw to a deserted area in the direction of Philippopolis (the city that had been destroyed three years before) after a surprise attack of the Vlachs (*Blas*), who were very close to killing him.<sup>29</sup>

The subsequent battle of Philippopolis has striking similarities to that taking place on April 14, 1205 near Adrianople. This time, however, the Latins had learned the lessons, while Henry I was a more capable commander than his brother Baldwin.<sup>30</sup> As in Adrianople, soldiers sent outside the city to find food and forage were attacked by Cuman and Vlach archers. However, they could not lure the Latins into following them. While the archers performed a feigned retreat, the camp remained prepared to repel the attack. The decisive battle began on July 31, 1208. The army under Boril's command—more than 33,000 men in 36 battalions (*batailles*) of 900 horsemen each—set up a battle formation near the Latin camp, which in turn positioned itself on the plain in

27 Akropolites, c. 25 (ed. Heisenberg, 43; transl. Macrides, 179).

28 Akropolites, c. 24 (ed. Heisenberg, 39; transl. Macrides, 172); Dujčev 1968, 36.

29 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 506–513 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 308–313; ed. Longnon, 30–33; trad. Fluieraru, 32–34); Zlatarski 1972, III, 275; Longnon 1949, 103; Božilov 1985, 70; Gagova 1986b, 200; Soustal 1991, 104; Fine 1994, 93; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 51; Nikolov 2012, 411.

30 Noble 2007, 70–76.

front of the city. The Latins were clearly outnumbered—only 2,000 men in 15 *batailles*, in addition to three Greek *batailles*.<sup>31</sup> According to Henry de Valenciennes, the soldiers in Boril's army had swords made of Bohemian steel, some of the best weapons at that time. Boril started the battle, but his troops were quickly repelled by a charge of the heavy cavalry led by Marshal Geoffroy de Villehardouin. The fact that the battle was fought in an open field provided an advantage for the Latin cavalry, which was able to compensate for its small numbers. As seen in previous battles, the Cumans were successful only in surprise attacks; moreover, it was difficult for them to fight during summer time. Thus, on the August 1, the iron-clad knights riding powerful *destriers* in a compact formation, though few in numbers, managed to disband and scatter the light cavalry of the Cumans and the Vlachs.<sup>32</sup>

Although a brilliant victory, Philippopolis did not open a massive expedition against Bulgaria. On the contrary, after less than three years, Boril resumed the raids. In response, Henry I simply strengthened his control of Western Thrace by means of an alliance with Slav, Boril's rival. After the victory of Philippopolis, Henry's army moved to Kritzimos. Slav paid homage there to the emperor and promised to remain faithful to him. The emperor accepted Slav's request to marry his illegitimate daughter of unknown name, and granted him as fiefdom the territories conquered during the 1208 campaign. Henry had not apparently abandoned the plan to put replace Boril with Slav, for he told him that with God's will, he would also make him lord of Great Vlahia. According to both Jean Longnon and Günter Prinzing, Great Vlachia (also called *Blaquie* in the first chapter of Henry de Valenciennes's chronicle)<sup>33</sup> was that under Boril's rule, not that in Thessaly.<sup>34</sup> However, Henry's plan never came true, even if Slav

31 Henri de Valenciennes, c. 521 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 316–317; ed. Longnon, 36; trad. Fluieraru, 37). In chapter 543 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 330–331; ed. Longnon, 47), Henri de Valenciennes claims that there were only 400 knights. Jean Longnon has explained the difference in terms of squires being counted, or not. Cristea 2002, 251 wrongly believes that 15 battalions represent 15,000 warriors.

32 Henri de Hainaut, 2 (PL, vol. 215, 1522–1523= FLHB IV, 17–18); Henri de Valenciennes, c. 514–544 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 312–331; ed. Longnon, 34–47; trad. Fluieraru, 35–45); Zlatarski 1972, III, 276–277; Longnon 1949, 103–104; Prinzing 1972, 101, 120; Carile 1978, 238; Brătianu 1980, 75; Božilov 1985, 70; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 84–87; Ciobanu 1985, 167; Gagova 1986b, 200; Cristea 2002, 248–252; Dall'Aglio 2003a, 157; Dall'Aglio 2008–2009, 52; Mărculeț 2010b, 290; Van Tricht 2015, 332.

33 It is important in this respect to remember that Henri de Valenciennes has no knowledge of Bulgarians, and only mentions Vlachs and Cumans. To him, Boril was the ruler of Vlachia, with no mention of Bulgaria.

34 *Contra*: Zlatarski 1972, III, 279; Koledarov 1979, 51; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 90.

remained a staunch ally of the Latins. After his marriage with Henry's daughter in Constantinople (November 1208), he received the title of despot<sup>35</sup> and probably also the name of Alexios (the title and name are attested in a donation charter dated to 1220 and preserved in Athos). Alexios Slav became the ruler of Melnik most likely in 1211 (when Boril was once again defeated by Henry). He ruled there until around 1229. At the time of the meeting in Kritzimos, he was still the lord of Tzepaina. That much results from the route taken by Henry's army. From Philippopolis, he moved to Kritzimos, and from there to Stenimachos, before returning to Constantinople. Tzepaina is only 47 km away from Kritzimos.<sup>36</sup>

It is impossible for Slav to have been the son of Ivanko and Asan's sister-in-law, as Vasile Mărculeț believes, on the basis that both characters are called Alexios, and ruled over approximately the same territory.<sup>37</sup> The love affair between Ivanko and Asan's sister-in-law must have taken place between 1195 and 1196, while Slav first appears in the sources in 1208. If Mărculeț would be right, one would have to admit that a 12-year old boy was the lord of Tzepaina.

To be sure, Boril had a brother, named Strez (Στρεάζος in Greek, *Stratius* or *Stracius* in Latin). When Boril assumed power, Strez feared that he would be killed by his brother, and fled to Serbia, to the great župan Stephen II. According to the *Life of Stephen Nemanja* written by his son, and to the two versions of the *Life of Saint Sava*, Boril asked the great župan to return the fugitive, but Stephen II refused and instead entrusted Strez with the stronghold in Prosakos. In 1208, when Boril was battling Henry in Thrace, Stephen II occu-

35 The title of despot is mentioned by Akropolites. Ciobanu 1985, 170–171, ignoring that source, believed that it was John Asan II, not Henry I, who bestowed the title upon Slav. Biliarsky 1995, 122–132 has demonstrated that the Latins took the title from the Byzantines, with the meaning of son-in-law of the emperor. Manuel I Comnenos introduced the title in 1163. The title of Slav was later recognized in Bulgaria under John Asan II, as it was mentioned in Boril's *Synodikon* (ed. Popružhenko, 87; Petkov 2008, 258). See also Biliarsky 2011, 276, 279.

36 Henri de Hainaut, 3: *genero nostro* (according to the critical edition of Prinzing 1973, 418); Henri de Valenciennes, c. 545–549, 555–559 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 330–333, 336–341; ed. Longnon, 47–50, 52–54; trad. Fluieraru, 45–46, 48–50); Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 268; Akropolites, c. 24 (ed. Heisenberg, 39; transl. Macrides, 172); Longnon 1949, 104–105; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 277–280, 322; Nicol 1966, 299; Dujčev 1968, 32–37; Prinzing 1972, 100–101, 122–123; Asdracha 1976, 241; Nicol 1976, 27–28; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 90–92, 95, 104; Ciobanu 1985, 169; Hendrickx 1988, 67–68; Teoteoi 1989, 90; Soustal 1991, 104; Fine 1994, 94; Biliarsky 1995, 133, 144, 146–147; Petkov 2008, 478–481; Van Tricht 2011, 160, 186, 187, 390; Biliarsky 2011, 279; Nikolov 2012, 419–422; Curta 2016, 432.

37 Mărculeț 2009a, 316.

pied that part of Macedonia, which had been conquered by Johannitsa in the spring of 1204. Strez thus became the lord of the region between Ohrid and the Struma river. Soon after that, he moved politically on the side of Michael I Comnenos Dukas, the ruler of Epirus (1205–1215). Together with Michael, Strez paid homage to Emperor Henry I de Hainaut in July 1209, after he took control of the kingdom of Thessaloniki from the regent Oberto de Biandrate. The emperor replaced the latter with his brother Eustacius, who on this occasion married Michael's daughter. Boril and his brother Strez were also reconciled in 1209. Strez remained an enemy of Stephen II of Serbia until he died in 1214. It is possible that Boril had attacked the region and forced the Serbian forces out, a gesture that facilitated the reconciliation with Strez. In reality, the rapprochement between the two brothers was the result of Slav's alliance with Emperor Henry, since Slav was Boril's enemy. Strez received the title of *sevastokrator* from his brother, which is confirmed by the *Synodikon* of 1211, one of the first instances of that title in the sources. A *sevastokrator* had the right to rule over a certain territory, and he thus had autonomous power.<sup>38</sup>

Although no written sources mention it, the numismatic evidence suggests that as early as Johannitsa's reign, the present-day territory of Dobrudja, or some part of it seceded from the Second Bulgarian Empire. There are fewer "Bulgarian imitations" in Dobrudja than in the central parts of Bulgaria. Instead, Latin imitations seem to have been the preferred currency. Most common among those imitations is type C, which was struck after 1209. Interestingly, the same numismatic situation appears within the territories ruled by Strez. Therefore, the conclusion has been drawn that after 1204 an independent or autonomous polity, similar to that of Strez, existed in the Danube Delta area.<sup>39</sup>

Boril attempted to consolidate his power by persecuting the Bogomils. Those heretics lived not only within the lands under his rule, but also in those cities of Thrace which were the target of his raids. Ivan Dujčev believed that Boril's persecution also targeted the Cumans, whose religion was supposedly dualistic, but this idea is unacceptable.<sup>40</sup> Cumans at the time practiced shamanism,

38 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 531 = FLHB IV, 18–20, 23 = Prinzing 1973, 412, 423); Demetrios Chomatenos, 251\*–252\*, 407 (nr. 134); *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 87; Petkov 2008, 258; Stephen Nemanja, 114–115; Teodosije Hilandarac, 104–107; Domentian, 206–210; Jireček 1876, 246–247; Jireček 1911, 292–293; Zlatarski 1972, III, 270, 271, 281–290; Nicol 1957, 33–34; Wolff 1969, 208; Prinzing 1972, 100, 103–104; Nicol 1976, 26; Savčeva 1979, 54–55; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 88–89, 96–97; Božilov 1985, 98–100; Hendrickx 1988, 77; Fine 1994, 94–98; Maksimović 2005, 278–279; Curta 2006, 385; Mărculeț 2009a, 313–314; Van Tricht 2011, 160, 398; Biliarsky 2011, 279, 281, 302; Osswald 2011, 46–47.

39 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 134–136.

40 Dujčev 1975, 183.

which has nothing in common with any Christian heresy. Moreover, Boril could have hardly undermine his most important power support. The 1211 synod in Târnovo was summoned like the church councils had been summoned by Byzantine emperors. Boril personally led the debates, in which the heretics were condemned, thus assuming, either consciously or unconsciously, a prerogative of the Byzantine emperors, who were guardians of Orthodoxy. On the other hand, the Easter date mentioned in the text is that of the Roman calendar. The document that resulted from the discussions between the Orthodox and the Bogomils, the so-called *Synodikon* of Tsar Boril, completed the confession of Orthodox faith adopted in Constantinople in 843, but added anathemas against the new heretics, the Bogomils. Besides being a key source for the study of that heresy, the *Synodikon* contains a number of relevant pieces of historical information. Unfortunately, the original text has not survived. There are only two versions based on a text rewritten under John Asan II (in 1235) and then modified several times, up until the late 15th century. According to the text that is common to both versions, Boril ordered the translation of the *Synodikon* from Greek into Bulgarian on February 11, 6718 (AD 1211).<sup>41</sup>

The union of the Bulgarian Church with Rome was maintained. Two years later, the encyclical letter of Innocent III (on April 18, 1213), which first announced the pope's intention to summon a council in Rome (Lateran) in November 1215, reached the Archbishop of Bulgaria and Blachia. This, of course, can only mean that in the eyes of the pope, Basil was still under his jurisdiction.<sup>42</sup> Innocent III had after all proclaimed the Albigensian crusade against the Cathar heretics in southern France, who had beliefs similar to those of the Bogomils. The pope certainly wanted the heresy stamped out Bulgaria as well. There is even a possibility that the synod was convened at his suggestion.<sup>43</sup>

The synod also paved the way for the second Bulgarian alliance with the Empire of Nicaea, which was regarded as the beacon of Orthodoxy, since the Patriarch resided now in Nicaea. The alliance was concluded in March 1211. In fact, Theodore I Laskaris was already looking for some time (at least since late 1207) to forge an alliance with Boril. In a letter to Pope Innocent III (cited in the pope's reply from April 1208), the Nicaean emperor actually threatened

41 *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 80; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 57; Dujčev 1980, 118–124; Fine 1994, 100; Butler 1996, 203; Stoyanov 2000, 204–205; Podskalsky 2000, 126, 247–250; Mălinaș 2000, 168–176; Petkov 2008, 255.

42 PL, vol. 216, 825 (n. xxx); Gjuzev 1977a, 44; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 110; Mălinaș 2000, 178–179.

43 Stoyanov 2000, 204; Stefanov 2001, 343–345.



that if the Latins were not going to pursue peace, he would resort to an alliance with heathens (mostly likely the Cumans<sup>44</sup>) and Vlachs (*et associaberis Blachis*).<sup>45</sup> Michael I Comnenos Dukas and Strez joined Emperor Theodore I Laskaris and Boril in the alliance concluded in 1211, but Slav remained faithful to Henry I de Hainaut. The goal of the coalition was to attack Constantinople from both west and east. In a letter of January 13th 1213, Henry de Hainaut wrote that his empire was

encircled by four main powerful enemies, being constantly exposed to their attacks and threats. Surely, the first and oldest of those is Lascarus, who owns all the territory from beyond the St. George channel all the way into Turkey; he considers himself to be emperor, and often gives us trouble from that direction. From the other side, Burillus, who similarly imposed his will through violence against the Bulgarian people, usurping the imperial name and insignia, has pressured us for some time and caused problems with his many attacks. Elsewhere, in the kingdom of Thessaloniki, the mighty traitor Michael, and Strez, Johannitsa's nephew, who was the great destroyer of Greece, although both have sworn an oath of fidelity, now threaten to destroy that part with all their might.<sup>46</sup>

Theodore I Laskaris's intention was to counterbalance the alliance which Henry I had concluded with Kaykhusraw I either in 1209 or 1210.<sup>47</sup> The victory

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44 Those cannot be the Seljuk Turks, who are otherwise called *Ismaelitas* in the text.

45 PL, vol. 215, 1373 (n. XLVII); Miller 1923, 483; Papagianni 2011, 158.

46 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 530–531 = FLHB IV, 18 = Prinzing 1973, 411–412): “Intelligatis nos hactenus in nostro habuisse imperio quatuor inimicos habuisse principales et potentissimos, in medio quorum positi et expositi, illorum incursus assiduos sustinimus undique et insultus. Horum quidem primus et maximus fuit Lascarus, qui totam terram ultra Brachium Sancti-Georgii usque in Turkiam tenuit, et ibidem pro Imperatore se gerens, nos ex illa parte multipliciter aggravavit. Ex alia vero parte Burillus institit nobis, qui similiter inter gentem Bulgarorum, quibus se per violentiam praeposuit, imperiale sibi nomen cum singulis signis imperialibus usurpaverat et inde nos diu et multibus incursibus fatigaverat. In altera vero parte, videlicet in regno Thessalonice, Michaelicius, traditor potentissimus, et Stracius, nepos Johannicii, magni olim populatoris Grece, qui licet duo nobis fidelitatis iuramenta prestitissent, totis tamen viribus in partibus illis nostro exitio imminebant.”

47 Longnon 1949, 124; Gjuzelev 1977b, 146; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 100–101; Hendrickx 1988, 85–86; Treadgold 1997, 717; Külzer 2008, 142; Van Tricht 2011, 373–375.

over the Seljuq Turks at the battle of Antioch on the Meander (April or May 1212) emboldened him to take a more aggressive attitude towards Henry I.<sup>48</sup>

Pope Honorius III (1216–1227) responded immediately to the building of the anti-Latin coalition with the deployment of the Teutonic Knights in the Bârsa land (Burzenland, in southeastern Transylvania). King Andrew II's charter for the Knights (May 7, 1211)<sup>49</sup> specifically mentioned their obligation to raise fortifications in order to defend the kingdom against Cuman attacks. The Knights were also expected to expand the kingdom, no doubt in the direction of Cumania, across the Carpathian Mountains. Şerban Papacostea has highlighted the role that the Teutonic Knights played in papal policy, the goal of which to defend the Latin Empire against the Asanid state by attacking its most important allies, the Cumans. The Teutonic Knights took possession of some territories to the south from the Carpathians, but nothing is known about their battles against the Cumans.<sup>50</sup>

On April 4, 1211, while at Rousion, Henry I learned that an army of Vlachs, Cumans and Bulgarians had occupied an unnamed mountain pass, with the purpose to set up an ambush for the emperor and his retinue of 60 knights. Scouts were sent out, who confirmed the information. On the way back to Constantinople, the emperor gathered sufficient forces from the strongholds under his control to attack Boril. Surprised by the size of his adversary's army, Boril abandoned the operation and withdrew.<sup>51</sup> However, once Henry moved his army to Asia Minor to fight against Theodore I Laskaris, Boril resumed the operations against the Latins. First, he prompted Strez to attack the kingdom of Thessaloniki with 52 battalions (*acies*) that he had sent to him. It remains unknown how many soldiers were in those battalions mentioned in Henry I's letter. In Henry I's absence, Berthold de Katzenelbogen repelled the attack together with Eustacius, and won the battle of Pelagonia (Monastir). Changing sides again, Michael I Comnenos Dukas fought on the side of the Latins. Boril then attempted to take Thessaloniki by himself (October 1211). Henry de Valenciennes mentions Vlachs and Cumans in his army (*Blaques et Comains*).

48 For the date see Van Tricht 2001, 223–227; Van Tricht 2011, 361, 375 (who made the correction of the previously accepted date, 1211).

49 Hurmuzaki, *Densuşianu* 1887, 56–58 (doc. XLI).

50 Papacostea 1993, 30–31 (see also Achim 2008, 52). For the Teutonic Knights in Transylvania, see Glassl 1971; Armbruster 1979; Holban 1981, 9–48; Turcuş 2001, 215–233; Hunyadi 2008.

51 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 531 = FLHB IV, 20 = Prinzing 1973, 413–414); Longnon 1949, 125; Prinzing 1972, 104; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 101–102; Fine 1994, 98–99; Külzer 2008, 142–143; Simeonova 2011, 520; Komatina 2014, 122.

Eustacius asked for Slav's assistance, and Boril's attack was also repelled. His army allegedly lost 24 infantry and 2 cavalry battalions in the confrontation.<sup>52</sup>

Having failed so many times, Boril decided to change his attitude towards the Latin Empire, the army of which had just obtained great victories against the Empire of Nicaea. His ally Theodore Laskaris had been compelled to give the Latins through the treaty of Nymphaion (summer or autumn of 1213) the entire coast of the Marmara Sea, as well as segments of the Aegean coast, including cities such as Nikomedia and Pergamon.<sup>53</sup> Boril had practically no choice. Henry I, on the other hand, badly needed an ally in the West, who could keep in check Michael of Epirus, the potential contender aiming at restoring the Byzantine Empire.

The recently widowed emperor agreed therefore to marry Johannitsa's daughter, who had meanwhile become Boril's stepdaughter. Henry was advised to do so by his barons, who regarded the marriage as the most effective way to establish peace with the Vlachs and the Cumans. The emperor was initially reluctant, allegedly because of contempt for the woman's low social origin, but the barons pointed out that the Vlachs had become "the strongest and most feared people of the kingdom and of the earth." An envoy was eventually sent to Târnovo, and returned with the bride and an impressive dowry. Robert de Clari is our main source for this event that took place late in 1213 or in early 1214. The marriage marks the entrance of the Asanids into the ranks of the elite European families, less than three decades after the uprising in Târnovo. The marriage is mentioned briefly by other Western sources, which insist that the woman was Johannitsa's daughter.<sup>54</sup> In fact, she had married Henry as

52 Henri de Hainaut, 3 (Brial, *Recueil*, 531, 533 = FLHB IV, 20, 23 = Prinzing 1973, 414, 417–418); Henri de Valenciennes, c. 686–688 (ed. Natalis de Vailly, 416–417; ed. Longnon, 117–118; trad. Fluieraru, 93–94); Longnon 1949, 125–126, 128; Dujčev 1968, 35; Setton 1969, 209; Prinzing 1972, 104–105; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 102–103; Fine 1994, 99; Van Tricht 2001, 234–236, 420; Van Tricht 2011, 186, 391; Nikolov 2012, 423.

53 Longnon 1949, 128; Ostrogorsky 1956, 452; Vasiliev 1958, 516; Nicol 1966, 300; Setton 1969, 209; Van Tricht 2001, 414–419; Van Tricht 2011, 353.

54 Robert de Clari, c. 116–118 (ed. Lauer, 108–109; transl. Fluieraru, 172–173); Bernard, ed. *Las Matric* 391 (trad. Fluieraru, 210 ("li empereres Henrys fist pais as Blas et prist le fille l'empereur, de Blakie, pour avoir l'aiue de lui et de sa terre"); Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 674 (ed. Markov, 72/73, 104/105): "il fist pais a Johennis, le roi de Blaquie, et a Toldre l'Ascre. Il prist la fille Johennis a femme." Albericus, ed. Pertz, 886, FLHB IV, 183 ("et quidam cardinalis a domino papa ad eum fuit transmissus, filiam quoque suam dedit Constantinopolitano imperatori Henryco, et ita pacem ad invicem habuerunt"); Mouskés, 405 ("La fille Jehannin le Blas /Ot espouse"); *Chronique de Flandre*, 86 ("prist à femme la fille du seigneur de Blaquie, pour avoir l'aide de luy") and 99 ("Johannins li

Boril's stepdaughter.<sup>55</sup> Some historians have claimed that her name was Mary on the basis of the wrong dating of a document from Pisa (1214 instead of 1228), which mentions an *imperatrix Maria*. However, the empress in question is not Henry's spouse, but Theodore Laskaris's.<sup>56</sup>

The papal legate may have played a key role in arranging the marriage and the subsequent peace treaty. The legate, whom Albericus calls cardinal, has been identified as Pelagius of Albano, whom Pope Innocent III had sent to Constantinople in August 1213 to handle the union of the Greeks with the Church of Rome.<sup>57</sup>

A number of sources claimed that following Henry's marriage with the stepdaughter of Boril, the latter also married Yolanda (of Flanders), Henry's sister and Peter of Courtenay's widow. No less than ten children resulted from her marriage with Peter, including two daughters—Yolanda, who in 1215 married King Andrew II of Hungary, and Mary, who in 1219 married Theodore Laskaris. The sources in question mistake Boril for "Johannis" and do not give the name of his alleged bride. At work may have been confusion with Slav, who married Henry's daughter.<sup>58</sup> However, if Boril married a second time, it could only mean that his first, Cuman wife (whom he married in 1207) either had died or had

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donna une sienne fille); Dandolo, 285 (Henrycus imperator Constantinopolitanus, cum Blacis pace firmata, filiam principis ipsorum duxit uxorem, et universa usque Thesaliam restituta sunt"); Lorenzo de Monacis, 145 ("firmata pace cum Ulachis, filiam principis ipsorum duxit uxorem"). See Iorga 1937, 116; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 309; Nicol 1966, 301; Setton 1969, 209; Prinzing 1972, 108, 130; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 58–59; Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 104; Brătianu 1980, 75; Božilov 1985, 72, 93–94; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 105; Hendrickx 1988, 93–94; Van Tricht 2001, 421–422; Markov 2008, 27–29; Markov 2010, 16–19; Pecican 2010, 88–91; Van Tricht 2011, 392–393.

55 See Cankova-Petkova 1976, 59; Božilov 1985, 93–94; Fine 1994, 101; Angold 2011; Curta 2006, 385; Georgieva 2015, 342–343.

56 Longnon 1949, 149; Prinzing 1972, 130; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 59; Božilov 1985, 93.

57 Prinzing 1972, 108; Érszegi 1975, 93; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 58; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 106; Fine 1994, 100–101; Treadgold 1997, 718; Van Tricht 2001, 422.

58 Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 674 (ed. Markov, 72/73): "il prist la fille Johennis a femme et li donna une soie nieche en mariage, et une en donna a Toldre l'Ascre, et la tierce au roi Andrieu de Hongrie. Ces III damoiselles estoient filles le conte Pierron d'Aussoirre et la contesse Yolent, suer l'empereour." Mouskés, 402–403 (v. 23004–23011): "Li buens rois de Hongrie, Andrius / Ot l'aisnee que moult ama, / Que Henrys d'Ango li douna; / Et la seconde ot Johanins, Sire des Blas et des Commins / La tierce fut sacans et aspre / Cele si fu donnée a Lascre (versuri ignorate de Ciobanu 1976); Chronique de Flandre, 99: Johannins li donna une sienne fille, et donna li emperères Henrys trois siennes nièches, filles de se soer femme le conte Pieron d'Auçoirre, en mariage, l'une à Johannin, l'autre à Coldelastre, le tierche à Andrieu de Hongherie." See Iorga 1937, 116; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 59–60; Gjuzelev 1977b, 146; Božilov 1985, 72; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985,

been repudiated. Be as it may, there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the idea that many Western sources were confused about who married whom in the early 13th-century Balkans. The *Estoire de Merlin* written between 1220 and 1230 goes as far as to claim that a daughter of the emperor of Constantinople married the *rois de blasque et de hongherie*.<sup>59</sup>

Henry's marriage with Boril's stepdaughter was followed by a peace treaty, which gave to Henry the territories in Thrace and Macedonia previously conquered by Johannitsa, as the woman's dowry. That Boril became Henry's vassal results from Bernard's description of the peace—"in order to receive help from him and his country (*pour avoir l'aïue de lui et de sa terre*)—a clear reference to *auxilium* (one of the obligations of a vassal). The plan to turn Bulgaria into a *terra* of the Latin Empire has been on Henry I's mind from the very beginning of his reign (see Chapter 6). Henry's potential successor—the son expected to be born from his marriage with Boril's stepdaughter—would have thus ruled over both the Latin Empire and Bulgaria, which would have brought to fruition the papal plans to reconcile the two states.<sup>60</sup> However, the short-term of the peace was that it effectively killed the anti-Latin by virtue of an inversion of alliances. From Boril's perspective, the peace promised to restore the unity of Bulgaria, since, under the new circumstance, Strez had to recognize him as overlord. Slav had already been an ally of Henry I, which effectively put an end to his secession as well. As a result of those developments, paradoxically, Bulgaria became in 1214 the largest state of the Balkan Peninsula, with the direct assistance of its former enemy, the Latin Empire.

The peace is also confirmed by the discovery of the seal of Emperor Henry I in the Tsarevets citadel of Tărnovo. The seal must have been attached to a letter sent to Boril.<sup>61</sup> However, Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca is wrong when assuming that Henry I also bestowed upon to Boril a coat of arms. Tanașoca analyzed two coats of arms in the armorial Wijnbergen (ca. 1280), which are attributed to two kings *de Blaquie* and *de Blaqe*. Both have triangular shields with ten golden and red alternating strips. On one of them, two black lion paws are crossed on top of the strips. Tanașoca assumes that Henry I kept as heraldic symbol the lion of the Flemish dynasty, and draws the conclusion that the lion paws indicate that Boril was a vassal of Henry. In fact, as Dan Cernovodeanu has shown, Henry I no longer considered the Flemish lion as his heraldic symbol. Both he

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106; Schmitt 1989, 41; Fine 1994, 101; Achim 2008, 42; Markov 2010, 19–27; Mihaylov 2010, 239–254; Mărculeț 2010b, 291; Van Tricht 2011, 394.

59 *Estoire de Merlin*, 131.

60 Van Tricht 2001, 422; Van Tricht 2011, 392–393.

61 Gjuzev 2000, 39–40; Jordanov 2009, 107.

and subsequent emperors took on very different heraldic signs. It should also be noted that the Wijnbergen armorial includes royal blazons in existence at the time of its composition, 1265 and 1288.<sup>62</sup> Cernovodeanu pointed out therefore that the shield with lion paws must have belonged to one of the last Asanids. He attributed the simple one to Litovoi, the voivode of Oltenia.<sup>63</sup> No evidence exists that the first emperors of the Second Bulgarian Empire employed coats of arms. Khristo Dermendžiev has suggested that the adoption of coats of arms was the result of contact with the crusaders.<sup>64</sup> However, the only piece of evidence he could cite is Kaloian's ring from the Tărnovo grave, which has been dated to the 14th century.

With the peace of 1214 came the political stabilization in the eastern Balkan Peninsula. The Latin Emperor now exercised hegemonic power through alliances and family relationships. Boril's expansionist ambitions could only be directed to the west. In fact, the joint expedition of 1214 against Serbia was the result of the alliance between Boril and Henry I. Strez, who has previously betrayed Stephen II, also joined in the expedition. Written no more than two years after the events, the story of the great župan Stephen II is the only source regarding this war (although the two version of the Life of St. Sava mention the death of Strez). According to Stephen II, Boril attacked Niš together with the troops sent by his son-in-law Henry (who is called "Filander," because he was from Flanders). However, disagreement between the allies prevented them from taking the city. This episode was ascribed to the miraculous intervention of the former great župan Stephen Nemanja, who had become Saint Symeon the Myrrh-streaming. During the campaign, Strez was killed by Serbian troops that reached Prosakos. Legend has it that, after Saint Sava could not persuade to become a Serbian ally, Strez was killed by Archangel Michael. His lands were divided between Bulgaria and the Latin Empire. Boril did not participate in the following conflict of 1215, in which Henry I and Andrew II unsuccessfully attempted to conquer and divide Serbia among themselves.<sup>65</sup> Stephen II came out of those events not only unscathed, but with two considerable advantages. First, he was crowned king by the pope

62 *Ordinary of Medieval Armorial* (<http://www.armorial.dk/survey/ARMORIALS.pdf>, visit of March 26, 2016), 265.

63 Cernovodeanu 1979, 211–232; Tanașoca 1987; Cernovodeanu 1994.

64 Dermendžiev 1986, 112.

65 Stephen Nemanja, 113, 114, 125; Jireček 1911, 293–298; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 310–317; Longnon 1949, 149–150; Setton 1969, 210; Prinzing 1972, 105–106, 109–110; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 108–109; Hendrickx 1988, 86, 95–96; Schmitt 1989, 41–42; Fine 1994, 103–105; Maksimović 2005, 279–280; Achim 2008, 44; Van Tricht 2001, 423–429; Van Tricht 2011, 186–187, 397–401; Komatina 2014, 118–128. The killing scene is represented in a fresco from the Hilandar monastery at Mount Athos (Cvetković 2011, 31, fig. 9).

in 1217. Second, the patriarch of Constantinople, who had been a refugee in Nicaea since 1219, recognized the autocephaly of the Serbian archbishopric. The new archbishopric was carved out of the territory under the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ohrid.<sup>66</sup>

After concluding the peace with the Latin Empire, Boril's goal was to build a closer relation with Hungary, the kingdom led by Andrew II, the younger brother of Margaret of Hungary. King Andrew II's sister, Margaret, was the widow of both Isaac II and Boniface, as well as a regent of Thessaloniki for her son Demetrios. She wanted to recover her dowry, namely the territory now under Bulgarian control, which had long been claimed by her other brother, King Emeric. Since Hungary was the ally of the Latin Empire, the peace between Boril and Henry I naturally encouraged a rapprochement between Bulgaria and Hungary. This is the only possible explanation for Andrew II's offer of military aid (*auxilium*) to Boril, who was confronted with a rebellion in Vidin. Boril asked for that assistance in the name of the friendship binding the two rulers together (*ex amicitiae fiducia implorasset*). The events are known only from a single charter of 1250 in favor of Joachim, the count of Sibiu, who led the Hungarian troops sent to help Boril. The events are commonly dated to 1213 (although some have advanced an earlier date—1211), but Andrew II could not have possibly offered any military assistance to Bulgaria, while Boril was at war with Henry. In other words, those events must post-date Henry's marriage to Boril's stepdaughter. It is only after that that cordial relations between Boril and Andrew II could have been established. The date of the events cannot therefore be earlier than 1214.<sup>67</sup> The troops that Joachim, the count of Sibiu, led to Vidin was made up of Saxons, Szeklers, Romanians (*Olaci*), and Pechenegs. They first reached the Obozt river (Ogosta) and then Vidin (*castrum Budin*), where they defeated the rebels (*Bulgaros*) and returned the town to Boril (*Ascenus Burul imperator Bulgarorum*). What the reasons for rebellion were in the first place remains unknown. However, the rebels (*infideles suos*) may have well tried to secede, much like Slav. The Cumans who fought on the rebels' side against the troops of Count Joachim on the Obozt river were led by

66 Prinzing 1972, 155–168; Fine 1994, 107–108; Achim 2002, 120; Curta 2006, 391–393; Achim 2008, 45; Madgearu 2008, 78; Stanković 2015, 47.

67 To be sure, before the details about the expedition to Vidin, the charter also mentions Joachim's participation in the war against Halich, during which Roman II Igorevich was beheaded (1211). However, there is no reason to believe that the charter listed Joachim's deeds in a chronological order. Independently, the same conclusion on dating the events in 1214 after the marriage of prince Bela with Boril's daughter was drawn by Georgieva 2015, 341–342.

three chieftains (*tres duces de Cumania*), one of whom, named Karaz (Karas) was captured.<sup>68</sup>

The Cumans who fought on the rebels' side were from the lands north of the river Danube. Boril may have at that point cut relations with the Cumans, because of his alliance with Henry I. It was only natural for Cumans to be on the side of the rebels.<sup>69</sup> The seal of Boril discovered at Belotintsi comes from a stronghold in the immediate vicinity of Vidin, on the road to Loveč. The seal is a testimony to the fact that Boril maintained contact with someone in the region, possibly with his Hungarian allies involved in quelling the rebellion in Vidin. It was probably under the same circumstances that another military confrontation took place between Hungarians and the Cuman clan led by a certain Kuban. Another charter dated to 1214 mentions King Andrew II going to war against Kuban's men (*exercitum contra Gubatos*).<sup>70</sup> Nothing is known about the location of that confrontation.

In early 1214, Borilă offered the hand of his other, biological daughter (whose name is equally unknown) to Andrew II's oldest son, Prince Béla. King Andrew sent his chancellor, Thomas, to Târnovo to bring the future bride to Hungary, as indicated by a charter he issued for one of Thomas's companions named Hector. The document is dated to 1214 and explains that Hector had been "sent to Bulgaria with Thomas, our esteemed chancellor of the royal court, in order to bring the daughter of Barillus as a bride for our son, the king Béla" ("in Bulgariam cum dilecto nostro Thoma aule regie cancellario ad transducendam filiam Barilli filio nostro Bele regi desponsandam missus"). Nothing is known about the circumstances leading to this matrimonial alliance, specifically about who had the initiative. In 1214, Béla was only 8 years old, so Boril's daughter must have been only betrothed, not married to him. By the time Béla had come of age, Boril had been ousted, so there was no advantage any more in concluding the marriage. Instead, Béla married in 1220 the daughter of Theodore Laskaris, Mary. Nonetheless, it seems that Boril had agreed to offer his daughter a dowry consisting of the disputed territory between Belgrade and Braničevo. In other words, King Andrew II peacefully regained Margaret's old dowry, for which Johannitsa and Emeric had gone to war against each other. It is also possible that Boril gave to Andrew the territory between Belgrade

68 DRH D I, 28–29 (nr. 11); Érszegi 1975, 93; Cankova-Petkova 1976, 57; Iosipescu 1984, 312; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 107; Schmitt 1989, 39; Papacostea 1993, 36; Fine 1994, 101; Vásáry 2005, 58–60; Ioniță 2005, 31; Curta 2006, 385–386; Spinei 2006, 424, 427, 429; Achim 2008, 41; Mărculeț 2009b, 318; Spinei 2009, 145–146; Van Tricht 2011, 413.

69 Fine 1994, 101–102; Mărculeț 2009b, 318–319.

70 Wenzel, *Codex*, I (1860), 132 (nr. 66); Font 1988, 261–262, 265–266.



and Braničevo as a token of appreciation for the Hungarian assistance against the rebels from Vidin. At any rate, he clearly had in mind to restore the dowry of Margaret, who was Béla's aunt.<sup>71</sup> Some have claimed that the Hungarians, probably in cooperation with the Serbs, took the territory between Belgrade by force immediately after the death of Johannitsa or after the Latins defeated Boril in 1208.<sup>72</sup> However, after 1214, Boril was allied with Hungary, a position contrary to that of his predecessor, Johannitsa. On the other hand, it is often assumed that Andrew II's military intervention at Vidin opened a new chapter in the history of the Hungarian expansion into the northern Balkans.<sup>73</sup> Be as it may, a charter dated to 1217 mentions Braničevo under Hungarian rule. A nobleman in the service of Queen Yolanda distinguished himself in that stronghold (*iuxta castrum Boronch cum nobili apparatu militari exercuit*).<sup>74</sup>

Nothing is known about the last years of Boril's reign, except what George Akropolites write about that:

When the aforementioned Boril ruled over the Bulgarians as emperor, Asan's son John fled, going to the lands of the Russians. He stayed there a considerable time and, gathering about him certain of the Russian rabble, he claimed his paternal inheritance, fought against Boril, overcame him, and gained control of not a little land. Boril withdrew inside Tărnovo and was besieged, walled up, for seven years. When those who were with him grew weary, they surrendered to John Asan. Boril was captured while fleeing and was blinded by John, and it was in this way that John gained control over all the territory of the Bulgarians.<sup>75</sup>

In fact, several historians have noted that in this passage George Akropolites mistakes months for years. It is impossible for a siege to have lasted seven years.<sup>76</sup> Nor is it clear what territory (χώρα) did John first occupy. However, since he came with an army from Rus', it may have been in northeastern

71 Érszegi 1975, 93–97; Gjuzelev 1977b, 146; Božilov 1985, 71, 72; Font 1988, 265; Schmitt 1989, 40–41; Kojčeva 1993, 133; Dimitrov 1997, 3; Dimitrov 1998, 126; Vásáry 2005, 60, 61; Achim 2008, 41–42; Van Tricht 2011, 393; Ninov 2015, 133; Georgieva 2015, 339–347.

72 Hóman 1943, 12; Vasileva 1979, 77; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 115; Papacostea 1993, 30; Fine 1994, 102; Curta 2006, 385; Pecican 2010, 124.

73 Papacostea 1993, 37.

74 Wenzel, *Codex*, XI (1873), 141 (nr. 90); Dimitrov 1998, 123.

75 Akropolites, c. 20 (ed. Heisenberg, 33; transl. Macrides, 161–162; FHDR III, 402/403); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 468; FGHV VIII, 266–267; FHDR III, p. 438/439); Jireček 1876, 247; Fine 1994, 106; Mărculeț 2009b, 317–319; Mărculeț 2010b, 291.

76 Zlatarski 1972, III, 322–323; Prinzing 1972, 136; Božilov 1985, 73.

Bulgaria, possibly in Dobrudja. There, he may have found support among local landowners who were hostile to Boril. In any case, it appears that John's return was coordinated with a conspiracy against Boril. How could John have possibly gathered an army (be that of "certain of the Russian rabble") without pay? Funds for such an operation could have come only from inside Bulgaria, most likely from conspirators who wanted to replace the usurper Boril with the man whom they regarded as the legitimate emperor. Ruth Macrides translated the words *συγκλύδον Ῥώσων* by "Russian rabble." Following Jonathan Shepard's suggestion,<sup>77</sup> she assumed those to have been the Brodniki, who had fought alongside the Cumans in 1187. The idea is plausible, but impossible to prove.

The death of Boril's ally, Henry I (June 11, 1216) and the subsequent interregnum in Constantinople, during which Henry's sister Yolanda ruled while waiting for her husband Peter de Courtenay to arrive from Italy, must have emboldened the conspirators.<sup>78</sup> Asan's son took the power at some point in the early 1218, since it is certain that he already ruled in the spring of that year (see Chapter 8). He was then about 23 years old. Shortly before being ousted, Boril lost another territory. After the murder of Michael I Comnenos Dukas in early 1215, power in Epirus was taken by his brother Theodore Angelos Comnenos Dukas (1215–1230). He conquered the lands between the rivers Vardar and Strymon in the southwestern part of the Second Bulgarian Empire, including the cities of Ohrid and Prilep, which had passed from Strez to Boril. Theodore Angelos may have taken advantage of the beginning of the rebellion that eventually brought John Asan II on the throne in Tărnovo.<sup>79</sup>

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77 Shepard 1979, 206. The idea was also embraced by Vásáry 2005, 61.

78 Lazăr, Murat, 2007, 46.

79 Akropolites, c. 14 (ed. Heisenberg, 25; transl. Macrides, 144–145); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 461; *FGHB VIII*, 266); Zlatarski 1972, III, 321; Nicol 1957, 49; Nicol 1966, 305; Prinzing 1972, 114–116; Nicol 1984, 4–5; Kravari 1989, 41; Fine 1994, 104, 113; Bredenkamp 1996, 82; Treadgold 1997, 718; Van Tricht 2001, 237–238; Stavridou-Zafraka 2007, 119–120; Osswald 2011, 48–51.

## John Asan II (1218–1241)

John Asan II continued the alliances that Boril made with the Latin Empire and with Hungary. After Henry I's death (June 11, 1216), his sister, Yolanda, became the *de facto* ruler of the Latin Empire. Her husband, Peter de Courtenay, had been chosen emperor and he traveled from France to Rome to be crowned by Pope Honorius III (April 9, 1217). He never got to rule, however, as he was captured by Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas on his way from Dyrrachion to Constantinople. Yolanda died in September 1219, and a nobleman named Conon de Béthune assumed the regency for a short time. The new emperor, Robert of Courtenay, the son of Peter and Yolanda, was crowned on March 25, 1221. The Hungarian King Andrew II had since 1216 hoped that he would get the throne, as he was Yolanda's son-in-law, but that option was not taken into consideration by the barons who held the power in Constantinople. If this had been accomplished, through the personal union between the Latin Empire and Hungary, a new coalition would have appeared, and Bulgaria would have been part of it, given the dynastic relations that Boril had established.<sup>1</sup>

Because Henry I, Yolanda's brother, had been married to Johannitsa's daughter, Robert was related by marriage with John Asan II (he was the cousin of Henry I's wife). Robert of Courtenay reached Constantinople via Hungary (where his sister was queen) and then through John Asan II's lands, which Bernard the Treasurer, Andrea Dandolo and Lorenzo de Monacis call *Blakie*. According to Philippe Mouskés, Robert was accompanied by Andrew II, *by his son, Alexander*, and by King *Ausens* (John Asan II), who provided supplies of food and fodder.<sup>2</sup>

John Asan II's alliance with Robert of Courtenay was maintained throughout his entire reign, namely until 1228. A seal discovered in 1978 in the aristocratic

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- 1 Bernard, ed. *Las Matric* 391–393 (trad. Fluieraru, 210–213); Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 675 (ed. Markov, 72/73); Longnon 1949, 153–159; Nicol 1957, 50–53; Ostrogorsky 1956, 455; Vasiliev 1958, 519–520; Nicol 1966, 305–307; Wolff 1969, 211–213; Stavridou-Zafraqa 2007, 119–120; Angold 2008, 738; Osswald 2011, 53–57; Van Tricht 2011, 417–418; Albrecht 2012, 264–266.
  - 2 Bernard ed. *Las Matric*, 393–394 (trad. Fluieraru, 212–213); Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 675 (ed. Markov, 74/75); Mouskés, 404–405 (v. 23045–23069—ignored by Ciobanu 1976); Dandolo, 288; Lorenzo de Monacis, 146; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 326–327; Longnon 1949, 159; Vasileva 1979, 78–79; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 116–117; Papacostea 1993, 38; Markov 2010, 24–26; Van Tricht 2011, 395; Bárány 2013, 38–44.

neighborhood of the Tsarevets citadel substantiates that conclusion. The obverse has the Greek inscription *Robertos despotos*, the person being depicted crowned and sitting on the throne, and the reverse has the Latin inscription *Robertus Dei gratia imperator Romaniae* (the emperor is crowned and on horseback).<sup>3</sup>

There was a Cuman attack against the Latin Empire in 1222 or 1223. The source in which the attack is mentioned, but which historians have not used until now, places the event shortly after the death of Theodore I Laskaris in August 1222. The Cumans (*li Coumain*) besieged a castle located somewhere in the mountains (no doubt the Rhodopi, the only mountains belonging to the Latin Empire). Emperor Robert sent valiant warriors to help, but they were also defeated and most of them were slain.<sup>4</sup> The Cumans who fought against Robert's army were not John Asan II's allies. Had any state of war intervened between the Latin Empire and Bulgaria during this period, the sources would have mentioned it. Given that the attack took place in 1222 or 1223, this could only be an incursion of Cumans driven away by the first wave of the Mongol invasion, to which is linked the battle of Kalka (May 31, 1223).<sup>5</sup> Some time before that, another group of Cumans had attacked Transylvania and had been driven back by the Teutonic Knights, as indicated by papal letters from January 12 and December 12, 1223.<sup>6</sup> The lowlands in Wallachia and Dobrudja most certainly experienced those tensions and migrations, as suggested by the hoards buried at Dedulești, Bucharest-Ciurel, Buzău, Tulcea, Tuzla, and Silistra.<sup>7</sup>

Bulgaria and Hungary strengthened their alliance through another marriage. King Andrew II returned for the Fifth Crusade at some point in January 1218. On his way back home, he first reached the Empire of Nicaea, where he allied himself with Theodore I Laskaris (whose daughter, Mary, was betrothed to the heir apparent, Prince Béla). He then arrived at the Bulgarian border, where, according to Thomas of Spalato and Andrea Dandolo, John Asan II refused to allow him free passage, unless Andrew II gave his daughter, Maria, in marriage to the Bulgarian emperor. The Hungarian king agreed, because it was convenient for him to preserve the alliance with Bulgaria. He asked

3 Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 99; Gjuzelev 2000, 40–42; Jordanov 2009, 107–108.

4 Mouskés, 408–409 (v. 23155–23189). The account about the Cuman attack was summarized in Baudoin d'Avesnes, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 676 (ed. Markov, 74/75): “D'une part guerroyent li Coumain et commencièrent à fermer un chastel en une montaigne. Li emperères Robers i envia de sa millour gent pour le deffendre; mais il furent vaincu, et en furent li plus ocis.”

5 Spinei 2006, 436; Korobeinikov 2008, 388; Spinei 2009, 149–151, 597; Zimonyi 2014, 326–327; Uzelac 2015a, 31.

6 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 80 (doc. LVIII): *impetu paganorum*; 82 (doc. LX) = DRH D I, 7 (doc. 3); Ioniță 2005, 31; Spinei 2006, 430.

7 Oberländer-Târnoaveanu 1992, 89–92.

Pope Honorius III to give his blessing for the two marriages-in-the-making—his son with Theodore Laskaris’s daughter, and his own daughter with John Asan II (“Petimus etiam, quatinus nuptiarum commercia inter nos et iamdictum Lazcarum, inter Azenum etiam Bulgarie Imperatorem et filiam nostram celebrare”). Andrew had no problems recognizing the title of emperor (tsar) for John Asan II, something that his predecessors obstinately refused to do for Iohannitsa and Boril. Maria was 9 at that time, and the marriage was only concluded in 1221. Her dowry consisted of the Belgrade-Braničevo region, which had previously been given to the Hungarian king by Boril on the occasion of the never-consummated marriage between his daughter and Béla. The condition presented to Andrew for being allowed to cross Bulgaria in 1218 may have therefore been not just his marriage with Maria, but also the retrocession of the territory between Belgrade and Braničevo.<sup>8</sup> It is not clear if John Asan II had been married before. According to one supposition, he was first married with one Anna, who was then repudiated and sent to the monastery, where she became nun Anisia. Recently, Plamen Pavlov sustained that this nun was the widow of Iohannitsa.<sup>9</sup> Empress Maria will convert to Orthodoxy in 1235, changing her name in Anna. She erected the church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul in Tärnovo. The monastery, inside which the church was built, is located to the east from the Church of Saint Demeter, at the foot of the Tsarevets hill.<sup>10</sup>

Relations between Hungary and Bulgaria deteriorated in 1228, when the Hungarians unsuccessfully attempted to take Vidin. They were beaten by the Bulgarian troops under the command of John Asan II’s brother, the *sevastokrator* Alexander.<sup>11</sup> Having occupied Vidin previously (1203), the Hungarians may have now had desired to make theirs what they had helped Boril to retain

8 Thomas Spalatensis, ed. Perić, 164–165 (FLHB IV, 267): “ascendit in Bulgariam, ubi ab Oxano Bulgarorum rege detentus est, nec ante abire permissus, quam plenam ei securitatem faceret, quod ei suam filiam matrimonio copularet.” Dandolo, 287: “ab Oxano Bulgarorum rege captus, filiam suam ei copulare promisit et relaxatus est.” See Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 67 (doc. L) = FLHB IV, 28; Darkó 1933, 7; Hóman 1943, 21; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 325–326; Wolff 1969, 213–214; Érszegi 1975, 94; Gjuzelev 1977b, 147; Vasileva 1979, 76–79; Petkova 1983, 58; Božilov 1985, 78, 87; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 116–117; Schmitt 1989, 43; Papacostea 1993, 38; Fine 1994, 129; Kosztolnyik 1996, 60–68; Dimitrov 1997, 3–5; Dimitrov 1998, 132, 134; Curta 2006, 386; Achim 2008, 42–43; Uzelac 2008, 163; Božilov 2011, 348; Bárány 2013, 42–43; Georgieva 2015, 345–353; Pavlov 2015, 359–361.

9 Angelov 1981, 132; Božilov 1985, 86–87. The *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 88; Georgieva 1993, 124–125; Petkov 2008, 258, lists three wives for John Asan II. For the second opinion: Pavlov 2015, 358.

10 Popov 1985, 80; Bačev 2002, 269–276; Bakalova 2009, 242; Pavlov 2015, 361.

11 Alexander’s title of *sevastokrator* appears in the *Synodikon* (ed. Popružhenko, 87; Petkov 2008, 258); Savčeva 1979, 57; Božilov 1985, 92–93; Ninov 2015, 125, 130.

for himself in 1214. Viorel Achim, who corrected the date of the events (not 1230 or 1236, as previously believed<sup>12</sup>), suggested that Andrew II's goal was to counter Bulgaria's hegemonic position in relation to the Latin Empire, after the death of Robert of Courtenay in January 1228.<sup>13</sup> Equally significant may have been the competition between Hungary and Bulgaria for the control of Cumania. The Hungarians had already initiated in 1227 the mission of Christianization of the Cumans under chieftain Bortz. Prince Béla, who at that time was associated king and Duke of Transylvania, took advantage of the mission to turn the Cuman bishopric created in 1227 into a launchpad for Hungarian expansion to the east and to the south from the Carpathian Mountains. The Christianization of the Cumans in the Latin rite strengthened the Catholic block in Eastern Europe, at a time when even the Church of Bulgaria was under papal jurisdiction. The exact limits of its own jurisdiction are not known, but it most certainly included central and southern Moldavia up to the Siret river, as well as parts of eastern Wallachia.<sup>14</sup>

The attempt to convert as many Cumans as possible to Christianity gave impetus to the competition for Cumania between Hungary and Bulgaria, as Robert, Archbishop of Esztergom, coordinated the mission to the Cumans. In a letter of March 21, 1228, Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241) reminded him that those who attacked the converted Cumans were also enemies of the Church. Although he did not name names, he may have had in mind John Asan II.<sup>15</sup> The Hungarian attack on Vidin may have well been in retaliation for John Asan II's attacks on the (newly converted) Cumans.

Robert of Courtenay's deposition and subsequent death (January 1228) reopened the issue of succession in the Latin Empire of Constantinople. An important contender, John Asan II had been a staunch ally of the deposed emperor. Bernard claims that John Asan II helped Robert to keep his power over the country, probably offering military support against the attacks of Angelos Comnenos Doukas in Thrace (*li Blac li aidierent se tiere à retenir*).<sup>16</sup> Since at the time he was crowned (new) emperor, Baldwin II of Courtenay (Yolanda's youngest son) was only 11 years old, John Asan II proposed to take

12 Onciul 1968, II, 48, 52, 55; Hóman 1943, 34; Holban 1981, 60–63; Papacostea 1993, 41. Kosztołnyik 1996, 97 believed the attack had taken place in 1228.

13 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 134 (doc. CVI); Achim 2008, 68, 76–78.

14 Papacostea 1993, 66–69; Iorgulescu 1995, 178–185; Solomon 2004, 87–89; Ioniță 2005, 31–32; Achim 2008, 56–68; Spinei 2008, 436–437; Spinei 2009, 152–156.

15 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 111 (doc. LXXXVI) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, I, 108 (nr. 187) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 208 (no. 159); Andreescu 1938, 778; Achim 2008, 67–68.

16 Bernard (ed. Las Matric, 394 (trad. Fluieraru, 213); Van Tricht 2011, 395.

the regency in Constantinople, with his four-year old daughter Helen marrying the young emperor. This proposal is only mentioned in late Venetian sources (Torsello, Dandolo, Lorenzo de Monacis) and doubts have therefore been raised about its trustworthiness. Historians have noted that there is nothing of the sort in George Akropolites's work. However, the lack of confirmation in the latter is no serious reason for raising doubts about the information in the Venetian sources. The problem with John Asan II's proposal was consanguinity: Helen's mother, Anna Maria, was the daughter of the Hungarian Queen Yolanda, who was Baldwin II's older sister. Baldwin II could not have possibly married his aunt. Despite the Bulgarian emperor's promise that he would help with the recovery of the western provinces from Theodore Comnenos Doukas, his idea was therefore rejected, and regency was instead offered to John of Brienne, King of Jerusalem, who also became the emperor's father-in-law. According to the agreement, Baldwin II was going to assume full responsibility at age 20.<sup>17</sup>

John Asan II's idea seems to have been based on his last attempt to unify the two empires by peaceful means. When his proposal was rejected, he turned against the Latin Empire. The events bear a remarkable similarity to those of 913, when Tsar Symeon, after a series of wars against the Byzantine Empire, claimed the imperial title, taking advantage of the young age of the new emperor, Constantine VII. He offered his daughter in marriage, but Symeon was planning to rule the empire. Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos accepted the marriage proposal (but the marriage never took place) and Symeon's title of *basileos* (emperor) of the Bulgarians, but not of the *Romaioi*.<sup>18</sup>

Another consequence of John Asan II's failure to assume control over the Latin Empire was his direct confrontation with Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas, who also aspired to the throne in Constantinople. Ever since the beginning of his reign in 1216, Theodore had expanded the principality of Epirus, at the expense both of Bulgaria and of the Latin Empire. Within just five years between 1216 and 1221 he took over Ohrid, Prilep, Prosakos, Skopion,

17 Akropolites, c. 27 (ed. Heisenberg, 44; transl. Macrides, 184); Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 265–270 = FLHB IV, 35–37 (*Proiectus de contracto Imperii Constantinopleitani cum rege Regni Hierosolimitani*); Sanudo, 72–73; Dandolo, 292; Lorenzo de Monacis, 146; Zlatarski 1972, III, 337; Longnon 1949, 169–171; Ostrogorsky 1956, 460; Nicol 1966, 309–310; Wolff 1969, 216; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 51; Vasileva 1979, 81–83; Božilov 1985, 78–79, 102; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 123–125; Hendrickx 1988, 113–115; Papacostea 1993, 38–40; Bredenkamp 1996, 148; Ducellier 2008, 789; Angold 2011, 54; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1002–1003; Dall'Aglio 2011c, 177; Van Tricht 2011, 294–295, 396; Božilov 2011, 348; Georgieva 2012, 434.

18 Božilov 1986, 78–81; Fine 1991, 142–145.

Strumitza (from Bulgaria), Kastoria, Verroia, Serrai (from the Latins).<sup>19</sup> He also took Thessaloniki late in 1225, the region between the Nestos and the Maritsa river, up to the Rhodopi Mountains, and he even attacked the environs of Constantinople. In Thessaloniki, Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas was crowned emperor in the summer of 1227 by the archbishop of Ohrid, Demetrios Chomatenos (who also had the ambition to become patriarch).<sup>20</sup> Shortly after that, Theodore made peace with Alexios Slav, to whom he gave the hand of one of his nieces (at the time, Slav seems to have been a widower, although what exactly happened to his first wife, the daughter of Henry I of Hainaut remains unknown).<sup>21</sup> Despot Alexios Slav continued to rule in Melnik. He was still there in April 1229, when John of Brienne became the regent of the empire of Constantinople.<sup>22</sup> Nothing is known about his relations to his cousin, John Asan II (whose father was the brother of Alexios Slav's mother). Most probably, John Asan II viewed favorably Alexios Slav's joining Henry I's 1211 campaign against Boril.

Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas hoped to obtain from his alliance with Alexios Slav either his neutrality or, perhaps, even his cooperation in future conquests. Theodore then sought the alliance of John Asan II, with whom he had a common enemy—the Empire of Nicaea, which held several territories to the west from Constantinople, including the city of Adrianople (whose citizens had asked in 1224 to be relieved from Latin rule, but the garrison sent by the Nicaeans was driven away in early 1228 by the army of Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas). The Empire of Nicaea and the Latin Empire had been at peace since 1225. A coalition between the Empire of Thessaloniki and Bulgaria was thus forming against the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes (1221–1254). George Akropolites is the author mentioning that upon reaching the Bulgarian borders as a result of his 1224–1225 war against the Latin Empire, Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas and John Asan II became allies, an alliance sealed

19 Nicol 1957, 58; Nicol 1966, 308; Nicol 1984, 57–58; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 119–120; Kravari 1989, 42; Fine 1994, 113–114; Bredenkamp 1996, 66–68; Stavridou-Zafraka 2007, 120; Van Tricht 2011, 379, 384; Osswald 2011, 57–59.

20 Longnon 1949, 162–164; Nicol 1957, 60–63; Vasiliev 1958, 521–522; Asdracha 1976, 241; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 120; Soustal 1991, 105; Fine 1994, 120; Bredenkamp 1996, 69–79, 109, 157–165; Stavridou-Zafraka 2007, 121; Osswald 2011, 62–65.

21 Akropolites, c. 24 (ed. Heisenberg, 39–40; transl. Macrides, 172); Zlatarski 1972, 111, 321–322; Longnon 1949, 162; Nicol 1957, 59, 104; Dujčev 1968, 36–37; Wolff 1969, 210, 214; Prinzing 1972, 116; Fine 1994, 114; Bredenkamp 1996, 110–112; Van Tricht 2011, 379; Osswald 2011, 66.

22 Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 268 = FLHB IV, 35–37; Nikolov 2012, 424.



by the marriage of Theodore's brother, Manuel Comnenos Doukas, with one of John Asan II's daughters, Mary.<sup>23</sup>

George Akropolites also mentions that the alliance did not last long, as Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas attacked Bulgaria with a large army, which also included Western knights. He probably hoped that a victory against Bulgaria would eliminate a serious rival in the race for Constantinople. From Adrianople, the Epirote army advanced into Thrace along the Maritsa River. On March 9, 1230, while marching to Philippopolis, it engaged the Bulgarian troops at Klokoznitsa, next to a small stronghold, only where there was a small fortification, 8 km to the north-west from modern Haskovo. Victory seemed certain for the Epirotes, but the Bulgarian reserve that had been waiting hidden somewhere in the vicinity intervened at the crucial moment. Those fresh troops were commanded by John Asan II himself, and included 1,000 Cumans, whose surprise attack sealed the victory for the Bulgarians. Many "nomadic" arrows have been found during the archaeological excavation of the battlefield. Theodore, the emperor of Thessaloniki

was captured by the enemy, while not a few of his relations, his officials and chosen men, and all their possessions, became booty for the Bulgarians. Asan was rather more compassionately disposed towards the captured masses; he freed most of the army, especially the common people and the rabble, and sent them to their villages and cities, ostensibly acting compassionately perhaps because this was serving his own interests. For he wanted to rule over them, having broken them away from the Roman realm.<sup>24</sup>

23 *Regesten*, III, 8 (nr. 1711); Akropolites, c. 24, 25, 38 (ed. Heisenberg, 38–41, 60; transl. Macrides, 171–172, 178, 206); Mouskés, 409 (v. 23195–23206); Nikephor Gregoras, I, 2 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 74–75; FGHB XI, 123); Jireček 1876, 250; Zlatarski 1972, III, 337; Longnon 1949, 161, 167; Nicol 1957, 104–105, 114; Wolff 1969, 215; Asdracha 1976, 139; Vasileva 1979, 79–80; Božilov 1985, 78, 100–101; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 121–122; Hendrickx 1988, 107–108; Soustal 1991, 164; Fine 1994, 123; Bredenkamp 1996, 131–133, 147–148, 195–196, 235; Osswald 2011, 67; Georgieva 2012, 433–434; Pavlov 2015, 365–366.

24 Akropolites, c. 25 (ed. Heisenberg, 41–42; transl. Macrides, 178–179; FHDR III, p. 402/403–404/405); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 474; FGHB VIII, 269–270; FHDR III, 438/439); Nikephor Gregoras, II, 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 76; FGHB XI, 127–128); Zlatarski 1972, III, 337–339; Nicol 1957, 109–111; Vasiliev 1958, 524–525; Wolff 1969, 217; Nicol 1966, 310; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 128–129; Iosipescu 1984, 313–314; Nicol 1984, 5; Soustal 1991, 310; Papacostea 1993, 39; Bredenkamp 1996, 151–152, 189, 191–192; Vásáry 2005, 62; R. Kostova, *Battle of Klokoznitsa*, in OEMWMT, II, 467–468; Osswald 2011, 68–69.

After a while, while in captivity (during which he was treated well), Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas apparently attempted to spark a rebellion. As a punishment, he was blinded. The information recorded by George Akropolites is confirmed by other two sources, *The Life of Saint Theodora of Arta* (written by Iov Iasites in the mid-13th century)<sup>25</sup> and the chronicle of Albericus.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the account of a Spanish rabbi from the mid-13th century (Jacob Arophe) mentions that in charge with blinding Theodore were two Jews, as the Bulgarian emperor knew that Theodore had persecuted Jews in Epirus.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Theodore's blinding may have provided Manuel, John Asan II's son-in-law, a good reason for securing his power in Thessaloniki, as his father's blindness made any future claims to power impossible. John III Vatatzes also benefited from the elimination of the rival emperor.<sup>28</sup>

The victory at Klokotnitsa had major consequences. Immediately after that, the population of Adrianople submitted to John Asan II, and he occupied many other cities, such as Didymoteichon and Serres. The Bulgarian rule expanded far to the south, up to Great Vlachia in Thessaly, and to the west, up to Ohrid and into Albania. John Asan II also attacked Serbia, because King Stephen Radoslav (1228–1233) had provided support to his father-in-law, Theodore Comnenos Doukas. According to George Akropolites, as a punishment, John Asan II “plundered up to Illyrikon” (Serbia).<sup>29</sup>

The date of the battle is known from a Cyrillic inscription on a column in the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs in Tãrnovo, no doubt erected in honor of the victory on the occasion of its celebration:<sup>30</sup>

25 Talbot 1996, 330: “The emperor went on campaign in Zagora, and made war against Asan, the emperor of the Bulgarians. And he was defeated and taken prisoner by him, and deprived of his sight”.

26 Albericus, ed. Pertz, 927 (FLHB IV, 183): *Alsanus rex Bulgarie (...) ducem Durachii Theodorum, cepit et excecavit*.

27 Fine 1994, 124–125; Popkonstantinov, Kostova 2009, 137–138.

28 Bredenkamp 1996, 219–220.

29 Akropolites, c. 25 (ed. Heisenberg, 42–43; transl. Macrides, 179; FHDR III, 404/405); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 474; FGHB VIII, 269–270; FHDR III, 438/439); Jireček 1911, 303; Zlatarski 1972, III, 343; Ostrogorsky 1956, 460; Nicol 1957, 123; Nicol 1966, 310; Koledarov 1979, 56–58; Angelov 1981, 125–127; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 131; Fine 1994, 136; Bredenkamp 1996, 192–194, 217; Vásáry 2005, 62; Curta 2006, 394; Ducellier 2008, 791.

30 English translation from Petkov 2008, 425. For the Slavonic text, see Jireček 1876, 251–252; Zlatarski 1972, III, 341; Nicol 1957, 113; Vasiliev 1958, 525; Nicol 1966, 311; Malingoudis 1979, 53–59; Popov 1984, 8–16; Božilov 1985, 80, 85; Soustal 1991, 106; Fine 1994, 125; Angelov 2011, 106, 111; Božilov 2011, 348–349.

In the year 6738 [1230] I, John Asen, in Christ God faithful tsar and autocrat of the Bulgarians, son of the old Tsar Asen, built from the foundations and adorned with paintings the whole of this most honorable church in the name of the Holy Forty Martyrs with whose help in the twelfth year of my reign, in the year this temple was being painted, I went to war in Romania and routed the Greek army and captured Tsar Theodore Comnenus himself and all of his *bolijars*. I conquered his entire land, from Adrianopolis to Drach [Dyrrachion], the Greek [part], as well the Serbian and Albanian parts. The cities round about Constantinople and the City itself were ruled by the Franks but even they obeyed the hand of my tsardom, because they had no other tsar but me and they lived their days thanks to me. God ordained it to be so, because without Him neither word nor deed can be accomplished. Glory to Him for all ages! Amen.

The inscription does not only mention John Asan II's victory against Theodore Comnenos Doukas, but also the expansion of the empire, which confirms the information in George Akropolites's account. The Second Bulgarian Empire thus became the most important power in the Balkan Peninsula, far beyond Symeon's empire in the early 10th century. According to Akropolites, in the aftermath of his conquests, the emperor allowed the Byzantines to rule in some strongholds, while in others he placed garrisons and tax collectors. Conquered territories were therefore integrated and ruled much like the core lands of the empire. Leadership at the local level is best illustrated by a *sevast* named Pribo in Skopion, who was appointed there by John Asan II after the conquest of the city. He later established a church dedicated to Saint Paraskeva of Tmorani.<sup>31</sup> Another *sevast*, Alexie, was appointed commander at Stenimachos, as indicated by the inscription dedicated in 1231 during the stronghold's reconstruction.<sup>32</sup>

The inscription in the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs in Tărnovo also reveals that John Asan II's ultimate ambition was to become emperor in Constantinople. In the Stenimachos inscription, he is in fact named "Tsar of the Bulgarians and Greeks and other countries," which may be explained by means of his conquest of Greek territories, but also conveys the claim to power in Constantinople, along the lines of Tsar Symeon's model. The title of Emperor of both Bulgarians and Greeks appears in a charter from the Vatopedi Monastery at Mount Athos (1230) and in the privilege granted to the merchants

31 Demetrios Chomatenos, 160\*–161\*, 257 (nr. 76); Tsončev, Stoilov 1960, 35–36; Nicol 1976, 27; Kravari 1989, 141, 167–168; Lazăr, Murat 2007, 48.

32 Zlatarski 1972, 111, 359; Malingoudis 1979, 60–62; Petkov 2008, 426; Angelov 2011, 106–107.

of Ragusa (1230 or 1231).<sup>33</sup> John Asan II's golden seal is preserved attached to a document in the archive of another Athonite monastery, Zographou. The obverse shows the legend "John Asan, Tsar of the Bulgarians and Greeks". The tsar wears the symbols of imperial power—the diadem, the scepter and the globe with the cross. The reverse has a portrait of Saint Demetrios enthroned, a clear symbol of victory.<sup>34</sup>

*Romania* in the Tărnovo inscription does not refer to the Byzantine Empire in its entirety (the most common meaning of the name in Western sources), but only to the territory taken from the Latin Empire and from the Empire of Thessalonica. *Romania* in that sense is attested on 10th- and 11th-century seals of Byzantine high officials based in Develtos and Philippopolis. The same meaning is documented in an inscription from Preslav. The Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle dated to the 11th century also calls the Thracian Plain *Romania*.<sup>35</sup>

The key source for the expansion of the Second Bulgarian Empire in the years following Klokotnitsa is the privilege for the Ragusan merchants. That charter lists the cities and administrative divisions (named *hora* and *zemlja*) in Bulgaria, in which the merchants were allowed to engage freely in commerce: Belgrade, Braničevo, and Vidin in the north-west; Skopje, Prilep, Devol and the Arbanasi *zemlja* in the south-west; Adrianople and Didymoteichon in the south-east; and the Karvuna *hora* in the north-east.<sup>36</sup> Those, however, were not the limits of the empire. It is quite clear, for example, that the Second Bulgarian Empire extended north of Karvuna (Balchik) up to the mouths of the Danube, since the Cumans did not occupy that region<sup>37</sup> (and it is unlikely to have been a "local autonomous polity"<sup>38</sup>). By 1230, however, there was no

33 Cankova-Petkova 1969, 53; Božilov 1985, 81; Bompaire, Lefort, Kravari, Giros 2001, 379–380; Petkov 2008, 482–483; Živojinović 2012, 235.

34 Gerasimov 1960, 63–64; Schreiner 1986; Atanasov 1999, 149–150; Jordanov 2001a, 108–110; Petkov 2008, 217; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 45; Pavlikianov 2014, 576–577 and fig. 15–18.

35 Ovčarov 1975; Petkov 2008, 197, 425.

36 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1890, 781 (doc. DCXXXVIII); Thallóczy, Jireček, Šufflay 1913, 50–51 (nr. 163); Koledarov 1979, 9–10, 58; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 280; Biliarsky 1999, 179–183; Obreshkov 2001, 106–108; Curta 2006, 386; Petkov 2008, 482–483; Ducellier 2008, 790–791; Biliarsky 2008b, 259–269 (the land of Arbanasi is roughly the present Albania); Biliarsky 2011, 268–269, 359–360; Živojinović 2012, 229–239.

37 Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 80–81, 148 believed that Dobrudja was controlled by the Cumans, since it is not mentioned either in the Tărnovo inscription or in the charter for Ragusa. But there is no reason to believe that John Asan II would have stop short of incorporating all the lands south of the river Danube into his realm.

38 Ghiață 1981, 1864.

city sufficiently important in the region to be mentioned in the privilege for the Ragusan merchants (both Chilia and Vicina developed at a later date).<sup>39</sup> This is the most likely explanation for the absence of Dobrudja (the lands between the Danube and the Black Sea) from the charter for Ragusa. On the other hand, John Asan II would not have certainly tolerated the independence of a polity in such proximity to his capital in Tărnovo. Moreover, the goal of his policy was to establish control over the entire course of the Danube, especially after Cumania became a target for military expansion and missionary activity from Hungary.

Alexios Slav's principality, with its capital in Melnik, was also annexed in 1230 (even though it is not known whether its ruler was still alive at that time). From the former Empire of Thessaloniki only a small part survived under Manuel Comnenos Doukas, John Asan II's son-in-law, who ruled over it as despot until 1237.<sup>40</sup> John Asan II gained control over a large segment of the most important commercial and military axis of the Balkans. The *Via Egnatia*, which starts from Thessaloniki, crosses the regions conquered in 1230, especially Albania and central Macedonia. The other major road of the Balkan Peninsula, from Belgrade through Braničevo, Niš, Sofia, and Philippopolis to Adrianople, was already under the empire's control since the days of Johannitsa.

This territorial expansion led to a drastic restructuring of alliances. John Asan's II hegemonic power in the Balkans made it possible for him to contemplate conquering Constantinople and being proclaimed emperor there. This, however, would not have been possible while his church remained under Roman jurisdiction. John Asan II understood that if he were to chase out the Latins from Constantinople, his Orthodox credentials would have trumped any misgivings related to his Vlach or Bulgarian origin, so great was the hatred towards the Latins among the Greeks. Like John III Vatatzes, an equally ambitious ruler, John Asan II sought to rebuild the Byzantine Empire around the Orthodox idea (i.e., in opposition to Roman-Catholicism). He envisioned an empire that would have encompassed Bulgaria, Symeon's old dream.<sup>41</sup> This explains why shortly after the victory of Klokotnitsa, John Asan II began negotiations with Germanos II, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople

39 Nothing is known about the area covered by the land of Karvuna in 1230. Some believe that it extended all the way to the Danube Delta to the north (Biliarsky 1999, 199), but there is no evidence for that. For the etymology of the name, see Beševliev 1970, 76 (from the Greek word for charcoal).

40 Jireček 1876, 251; Nicol 1957, 114–118; Fine 1994, 126–128; Bredenkamp 1996, 198–201; Treadgold 1997, 722; Osswald 2011, 71–72.

41 Brezeanu 2001, 76; Bredenkamp 1996, 82; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1004; Dall'Aglio 2011c, 178.

(who had taken refuge in Nicaea). The issues at stake were the return of the Church of Bulgaria to Orthodoxy and the patriarch's recognition of its autocephaly. In my opinion, a reorientation toward Orthodoxy was the cause, and not the effect of the hostility, ever since 1231, of the Catholic powers, namely Hungary and the Latin Empire, towards Bulgaria.<sup>42</sup>

Upon learning that John Asan II was contemplating to abandon the Catholic faith, Pope Gregory IX wrote to the Hungarian king Andrew II and asked him to organize a crusade in defense of the Latin Empire (May 9, 1231). The pope's letter does not mention the enemy against whom the crusade was about to be directed, but it is clear that Gregory had Bulgaria in mind. This, on the other hand, was exactly what the Hungarian king wanted, for he must have been looking for an opportunity to take revenge for the defeat he had suffered in 1228. The Hungarian army attacked Bulgaria under the command of Duke Béla in the fall of 1231, and reoccupied the Belgrade-Braničevo region. On March 21, 1232, the bishops of both cities (*Albae et Brandusii Bulgarorum episcopi*) were already included into the hierarchy of the Roman Church, as indicated by a letter the pope wrote to the bishop of Cenad. One of the goals of the expedition may have been the occupation of Vidin, but the Hungarians failed a second time to take the city. Moreover, the Belgrade-Braničevo region was soon recovered by the Bulgarians (under unknown circumstances), but reconquered by Hungarians in 1254 (for the circumstances of that reconquest, see Chapter 9).<sup>43</sup> It is certain that Belgrade and Braničevo remained for a long while under Bulgarian rule, since several bishops of the two sees are known as suffragans of the patriarch of Tărnovo: Jacob, Porphyry and Ioanikie in Braničevo; Sava, Theodosie, Demetrius, and Symeon in Belgrade.<sup>44</sup> At the height of his power, John Asan II would have not relinquished those cities to Hungary. Conversely, no economic or political advantages would have derived from an expansion into the lands north of the Danube.

Following the 1231 expedition, a new province was created on the southeastern border of Hungary, the Banat—named so after a similar form of organization in use in Croatia (the name of its ruler, *ban*, is of Avar origin).

42 As maintained by Achim 2008, 79.

43 *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, I, 491 (nr. 785) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 231 (no. 175) = FLHB IV, 45; Jireček 1911, 304; Zlatarski 1972, III, 369; Gjuzelev 1977a, 46; Vasileva 1979, 86; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 135–136; Schmitt 1989, 46; Papacostea 1993, 41; Fine 1994, 129; Iorgulescu 1995, 160–161; Dimitrov 1997, 6–9; Dimitrov 1998, 134–138; Achim 2002, 125; Achim 2006, 34; Curta 2006, 387; Achim 2008, 79–81; Uzelac 2008, 163; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1005.

44 *Synodikon*, ed. Popruženko, 93; Petkov 2008, 260.

The Banat was further called “of Severin” after a Bulgarian stronghold on the northern bank of the Danube. The place name *Severin* (which exists elsewhere in Romania) derives from the Slavic word for “north” (*sever*): Severin was the “northern (stronghold).”<sup>45</sup> As Dimitre Onciul and others have pointed out, such a name makes sense only in reference to the lands on the other side of the Danube, in Bulgaria.<sup>46</sup> The Banat of Severin was established in 1232 as a bulwark against Bulgaria, and included the land in what is now southwestern and southern Romania, from the Banat Mountains to the Motru or even the Olt River.<sup>47</sup> Nothing is known about the possibility of a continuous Bulgarian rule over the territory between the Cerna and the Olt Rivers, which had been occupied probably in 1199 by Johannitsa.<sup>48</sup> It is possible that that territory was occupied by Hungary shortly after Johannitsa’s death, reclaimed by John Asan II in 1228, and then reconquered by Hungary in 1231. In other words, one can admit the possibility that the Banat of Severin was established in 1232 through the conquest of a territory until then under Bulgarian rule.<sup>49</sup>

A charter for the Hospitaller Knights granted to them in 1247 the *terra de Zeurin* described as between the Danube and the river Olt, bordered to the north by the land of Litovoi.<sup>50</sup> Since the Banat of Severin only comprised southern Oltenia, it is probable that the territory conquered by Johannitsa in 1199 also did not stretch much to the north of present-day Craiova.<sup>51</sup> Both Iosif Şchiopul and Gheorghe Brătianu believed in fact that the name of the city derived from Craina.<sup>52</sup> However, that etymology has been challenged, and the name seems to have initially been Bulgarian—*Kraliova*, with the meaning of “the village (or settlement) of Crai,” in which Crai is a personal name.<sup>53</sup> However, one particular testimony of John Asan II’s rule in southern Oltenia

45 Philippide 1923, 722; Rosetti 1986, 534, 759. See also Onciul 1968, II, 64. The word “sever” in the sense of “north, northerly” existed in Romanian until the 16th century.

46 Onciul 1968, II, 64; Brătianu 1993, 365; Davidescu 1969, 5 (in relation with the first Bulgarian tsarate); Ioniță 2005, 32; Achim 2006, 36; Achim 2008, 83.

47 Achim 2008, 82–88.

48 Viorel Achim assumes such a continuity between the Craina and the Banat: Achim 2006, 36; Achim 2008, 82–83.

49 The first to put forward that idea were Onciul 1968, I, 225; II, 62–64 and Brătianu 1993, pp. 365–366. More recently, this idea has been revived by Achim 1994 (see also his further works).

50 Hurmuzachi, Densuşianu 1887, 250 (nr. CXIII) = DRH D I, 22 (doc. 10).

51 Zlatarski 1972, III, 369–370 considered that it was extended up to the Carpathians (see also the critique of Velichi 1941).

52 Şchiopul 1945, 25; Brătianu 1993, 366.

53 Popescu, Toma, Balkanski 1995.

may be the large coin hoard from Balş, hidden after 1254 in circumstances discussed in Chapter 9. This hoard, in fact, includes 1763 Byzantine and Bulgarian bronze coins struck between 1185 and 1254, an accumulation spanning three generations in the family of a local Romanian or Cuman chieftain, most likely a subject of the Bulgarian ruler.<sup>54</sup>

Be as it may, the Bulgarian rule in the lands north of the river Danube abruptly ended in the year 1231. Cumania, understood as the lands to the east from the river Olt, had already been for a while under Hungarian control, especially after the establishment of the Cuman bishopric. A document in which Tsar Kaliman Asan (John Asan II's successor) appears as ruler of Moldo-Vlachia is in fact a 14th-century forgery. The only authentic thing about that document, now in the archives of the Zographou Monastery at Mount Athos, is John Asan II's golden seal attached to it. The combination of a forged charter and an authentic seal led Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu to the conclusion that the Second Bulgarian Empire ruled over Moldavia. However, Ioan Bogdan has demonstrated that the document in question is a forgery.<sup>55</sup> Bulgaria's expansion to the north stopped at the Danube. On the basis of a letter of Béla IV from June 7, 1238, in which the Hungarian king describes the region of the Banat of Severin as deserted and depopulated ("circa partes Bulgariae in terra, que Zeuren nominatur, que dudum fuerat desolata, populi multitudo supercreverit"), Viorel Achim has advanced the idea of a Bulgarian attack on the Banat in 1236.<sup>56</sup> This is doubtful, since nothing indicates that the desolation and subsequent repopulation resulted from any military campaign, Bulgarian or otherwise. A part, at least, of the local population may have fled when the Hungarians conquered Oltenia. If so, *populi* may refer to communities of believers for which the king requested the creation of a diocese. That, in fact, is the meaning of the word in a papal letter of November 14, 1234, which refers to *populi qui Walati vocantur*, who lived somewhere within the territory of the Cuman bishopric.<sup>57</sup> If the king

54 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1997, 140–144.

55 Hasdeu 1973, 173–174; Bogdan 1889–1890, 147–149. See also Bogdan 1889a, 303–304 (this charter was a source of inspiration for Paisij of Hilandar); Petkov 2008, 484; Mureşan 2011, 713; Pavlikianov 2014, 570–584. However, Nicolaescu 1910 admitted the authenticity of the document, supposing that it was wrongly transcribed at a later moment.

56 Achim 2006, 45; Achim 2008, 92. Holban 1981, 64–65 and Turcuş 2001, 300 have proposed instead a rebellion supported by Bulgaria in 1233, followed by a retaliatory expedition in 1234. Before them, Onciul 1968, 11, 47 thought that *desolata* meant "unorganized," i.e., a territory outside the Béla IV's realm.

57 Papacostea 1993, 63; Barbu 1998, 94–99. The document: Hurmuzachi, Densuşianu 1887, 132 (nr. CV) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, I, 1179 (no. 2198) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 284–285 (no. 209) = FLHB IV, 48–49 = DRH D I, 20–21 (doc. 9).



asked the pope to send a bishop for those *populi* in the land of Severin, that could only mean that those living there were Catholics, who had come either from Hungary or from Bulgaria after the creation of the Banat of Severin. On the other hand, had John Asan II attacked the Banat of Severin after 1233, Béla IV would not have hesitated to retaliate, and his actions would have left a trace in the sources.

The conflict with Hungary was in fact caused by John Asan II's separation from the Catholic Church. It was the pope who urged the Hungarian king to attack the Bulgarian emperor, while the Latin Empire was the first power to benefit from that action. Under those new conditions, John Asan II was compelled to enter an alliance with the Empire of Nicaea. After John of Brienne defeated him at Pigae in 1233, John III Vatatzes was also looking for an alliance with John Asan II. The treaty was concluded in 1234 in Gallipoli, and Helen (who was now ten years old) was given in marriage to the heir apparent in Nicaea, Theodore II Laskaris (the marriage took place in Lampsakos in early 1235). John III Vatatzes recognized John Asan II's imperial title, and the Bulgarian emperor renounced his claim to power in Constantinople. John Asan II's army occupied the area north of Tzurullon and to the west from the mouth of the Maritsa River, which thus became the border between Bulgaria and the Empire of Nicaea. The Kissos stronghold, located at the mouth of the river, was taken by John III Vatatzes.<sup>58</sup> In response to the Bulgarian-Nicaean alliance, John of Brienne sent in early 1235 an envoy to Jacobo Teupolo, the Venetian doge to request military support.<sup>59</sup>

Either in 1233 or in 1234, one of John Asan II's daughters, Beloslava, married the Serbian King Stephan Vladislav (1233–1243). John Asan II's new son-in-law was the leader of a pro-Bulgarian faction, which came to power after Klokochnitsa.<sup>60</sup> Serbia, therefore, became a satellite of the Second Bulgarian

58 *Regesten*, III, II, 14 (nr. 1730, 1744); Akropolites, c. 31, 33 (ed. Heisenberg, 48–51; transl. Macrides, 191, 194–195); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 477–478; FGHB VIII, 272); Nikephor Gregoras, II, 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 77; FGHB XI, 128; FHDR III, 498/499); Sanudo, 73; Dandolo, 295; Pappadopoulos 1908, 6–7; Miller 1923, 489, 523; Zlatarski 1972, III, 379–384, 388–389; Wolff 1949, 219; Longnon 1949, 172; Ostrogorsky 1956, 461–462; Nicol 1966, 311; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 49–51, 55–56; Asdracha 1976, 242; Gjuzelev 1977b, 149; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 137–138; Božilov 1985, 81–82; Langdon 1985, 105–106; Bartusis 1992, 23–24; Fine 1994, 129–130; Curta 2006, 388; Külzer 2008, 144; Angold 2008, 738; Ducellier 2008, 792; Achim 2008, 79, 89; Dall'Aglia 2009, 1011–1012; Dall'Aglia 2011c, 178–180; Georgieva 2012, 435; Angelov 2013, 273–276.

59 Dandolo, 295; Longnon 1949, 172; Hendrickx 1988, 121–122.

60 Jireček 1911, 304; Angelov 1981, 129–132; Božilov 1985, 84, 101–102; Fine 1994, 136; Bredenkamp 1996, 217; Pavlov 2015, 366.

Empire, much like the Kingdom of Thessalonica. John Asan II was the head of a hegemonic power in Southeastern Europe, a position Bulgaria had only enjoyed during the first two decades of the 10th century.

Inside Bulgaria, the Church sanctioned both the hegemonic position of the emperor, and his title of Tsar of the Bulgarians. Following his alliance with Nicaea, John Asan II obtained the recognition of autocephaly for the Church of Bulgaria. That came at a General Council that took place in Lampsakos-Gallipoli in 1235, after the emperor of Nicaea had given up the option of a reaching an agreement with Rome in exchange for Pope Gregory IX's acceptance for the Greek re-occupation of Constantinople. John Asan II thus obtained what his uncle, Johannitsa, had requested from Pope Innocent III. To be sure, the conditions were much more favorable in the 1230s, after the Church of Serbia had obtained autocephaly. For a while, the hierarchy subordinated to Rome remained in place, and the pope attempted one more time to convince John Asan II not to abandon Catholicism (see below). Patriarch Germanos II maintained his preeminent position in relation to the patriarch of Tărnovo, Joachim I (1234–1237), who replaced Archbishop Basil.<sup>61</sup> Towards the end of his life, before withdrawing to Mount Athos because of a conflict with the tsar, Basil appears to have returned to Orthodoxy.<sup>62</sup> As early as 1233, Archbishop Christophoros of Ankyra visited the former archbishop Basil at Athos, and invited the emperor of Bulgaria to remediate the situation of his church by sending to Nicaea a bishop who would be canonically ordained by the patriarch. It is important to note that Christophoros recognized John Asan II's imperial title, which was the equivalent of his own emperor in Nicaea.<sup>63</sup> St. Sava of Serbia may have played an important role in negotiations leading to the autocephaly of the Bulgarian church.<sup>64</sup> John Asan II was related to St. Sava by marriage, and the latter died in Tărnovo on January 14, 1235.

61 *Regesten*, III, 13–14 (no. 1744); Akropolites, c. 33 (ed. Heisenberg, 51–52; transl. Macrides, 194); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 478); Zlatarski 1972, III, 386–388; Andreescu 1938, 772; Nicol 1966, 311; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 61; Wolff 1969, 217, 219; Gjuzelev 1977b, 149; Božilov 1985, 82; Fine 1994, 130; Angold 2008, 742.

62 Tamanidis 1975, 42–47.

63 Zlatarski 1972, III, 362–365; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 57; Tamanidis 1975, 33–34, 42–44, 50–51; Gjuzelev 1977b, 148; Langdon 1985, 123–124; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 135–136; Papacostea 1993, 43–44; Bredenkamp 1996, 209–217; Mălinaș 2000, 173–175, 185; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1006–1007; Dall'Aglio 2011c, 178–179. Christophoros had been elected exarch for the western Greeks on August 6, 1232, in an effort to restore a single Church, subordinated to the Patriarch of Nicaea.

64 Idea suggested by Guran 2006, 65.

A papal letter of November 14, 1234 mentions pseudo-bishops of the Greek rite serving Romanians in Moldavia or eastern Wallachia. They must have been Bulgarians. They were not called “pseudo-bishops” because they were Orthodox, but because, in the eyes of the pope, they had not been canonically ordained. Daniel Barbu and Flavius Solomon have demonstrated that to the pope, those pseudo-bishops had infringed upon the legitimate jurisdiction of the bishop of the Cumans. They were outside the provisions of canon law, since they served illegally in another bishop’s diocese. Since Gregory IX regarded Bulgaria as under Roman jurisdiction, those bishops who refused to obey him could not have been ordained canonically.<sup>65</sup> The “pseudo-bishops,” therefore, were under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Tărnovo, who had illegally intruded into the Cuman bishopric. In the fall of 1234, the relations of Bulgaria both with the Church of Rome and with the Patriarchate of Nicaea must have confusing and not very clear to any of the sides involved. John Asan II had already opted for the Orthodox faith, together with his new archbishop, Joachim. However, Nicaea had not yet sent the official acceptance of autocephaly. In theory, therefore, the archdiocese of Tărnovo was still under Rome, in accordance with the union act of September 1203. That was the context of Pope Gregory IX’s reference to “pseudo-bishops” active inside the Cuman diocese. John Asan II had already made an alliance with John III Vatatzes against the Latin Empire, and if that Orthodox coalition had expanded north of the Danube, it would have created problems for Hungary as well.<sup>66</sup> The pope thus feared that ecclesiastical ties between Romanians to the south and to the east from the Carpathian Mountains with the Second Bulgarian Empire could pave the way for a Bulgarian conquest of Cumania or of the newly created Banat of Severin.

Bulgaria’s return to Orthodoxy after three decades of union with Rome also involved a re-writing of history. The version of Boril’s *Synodikon* that was composed at some point after 1235 (known as the “Palauzov version” after its discoverer) omits the Catholic tsar Johannitsa. By contrast, John Asan II, who is specifically mentioned as the son of Asan the elder (in order to stress the legitimate character of his rule, in sharp contrast to that of the usurper Boril),

65 Theodorescu 1974, 172–173; Bonev 1986, 105; Papacostea 1993, 62–64; Iorgulescu 1995, 187–206; Barbu 1998, 98–99; Solomon 2004, 89–92; Ioniță 2005, 33; Spinei 2009, 155; Cățoi 2010, 189–192.

66 Solomon 2004, 92–93 considered that John Asan II tried to organize an Orthodox alliance opposed to the expansion of Catholicism in the regions with Orthodox people north and south of the Danube (the bishoprics of Belgrade and Braničevo).

is praised for having *restored* the Bulgarian Patriarchate (which had existed between 927 and 971, during the First Bulgarian Empire).<sup>67</sup>

Nothing is known about how those who chose to remain Catholic were treated under the new regime. Paisij of Hilandar later claimed that Theophylact, who had come from Ohrid, became Patriarch of Tǎrnovo (Theophylact had indeed been archbishop of Ohrid, but more than a century earlier, between 1078 and 1107). According to Paisij, this convinced Asan (the first among tsars) to eradicate the Roman heresy that all Vlachs had adopted. The tsar passed through “the two Vlachias,” where he outlawed the heresy; moreover, those who used Latin writing or adhered to heresy were to be punished by having their tongues cut out.<sup>68</sup> This is evidently a mixture of fantasy with a few historically accurate details. Nonetheless, many historians have taken Paisij at face value, as they thought that he had something important to say about the highly controversial issue regarding the use of the Latin alphabet by Romanians, supposedly prior to their adoption of Cyrillic and Slavonic as the official language of worship (incidentally, such a theory had been advanced by Dimitrie Cantemir before Paisij, with more pertinent arguments). Alexandru D. Xenopol and Dimitre Onciul are to blame for having taken Paisij much too seriously on this point. Onciul believed that, even though Paisij did not write trustworthy history, one could believe him on this particular detail.<sup>69</sup> Ioan Bogdan refuted his arguments, and showed that Paisij probably mistook the abovementioned sanctions against heretics with those the archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid is known to have taken against the Bogomils. Likewise, Paisij must have imagined that because they were of Roman origin, Romanians must have initially had Latin books.<sup>70</sup> More recently, Flavius Solomon has drawn attention to the fact that Paisij was drawing on a tradition surviving at Mount Athos, and as a consequence, one should take seriously Paisij’s ideas John Asan II’s contribution to the religious organization of the Romanians in the lands north of the Danube.<sup>71</sup>

The autocephaly of the Bulgarian Church was recognized by all Orthodox patriarchs (Germanos II, but also Athanasios II, the patriarch of Jerusalem, Dorotheus, the patriarch of Antioch, and Nicholas I, the patriarch of Alexandria). Bulgaria thus became a true, smaller-scale replica of the Byzantine state. Having renounced all his plans to occupy the throne in Constantinople,

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67 Podskalsky 2000, 249; Mălinaș 2000, 173–175; *Synodikon*, ed. Popružhenko, 82–87; Petkov 2008, 256–257.

68 Paisij, 90–91.

69 Onciul 1968, I, 406–409, 621–622.

70 Bogdan 1889a, 301–307.

71 Solomon 2004, 93.

John Asan II turned Tǎrnovo into a second Constantinople, much like Symeon had done with Preslav. In many respects, he anticipated the ideology of “the Third Rome” articulated during the reign of Ivan Alexander (1331–1371). All churches that confirmed the position of the Bulgarian capital as a spiritual center, God protected, in direct imitation of Constantinople, have been built during John Asan II’s reign. In addition to the relics of Saint John of Rila, which had been brought to Tǎrnovo in 1190, the Bulgarian capital now had the relics of Saint Paraskeva (known as Petka to Bulgarians). Those relics have been taken in 1231 from a church in Epibatai (now, Selimpaşa), a little town between Selymbria and Constantinople. According to the saint’s *Life* written in the 14th century, the tsar demanded the saint’s relics as tribute from the “Franks.” Despite the fact that she was of Greek origin, Saint Paraskeva became the celestial patron saint of Tǎrnovo and of Bulgaria in its entirety.<sup>72</sup>

The imitation of the Byzantine Empire followed the model previously used by Symeon in Preslav, where the Bulgarian ruler erected or amplified buildings that represented both the secular and the religious power. The palace on the Tsarevets citadel was much enlarged under John Asan II, to a total area of 4,872 square meters. The palace was protected by its own ramparts, the 1.8–2.4 m thick wall of which was made of blocks bonded with mortar and was supported by buttresses. Access to the palace enclosure was through two gates, on the northern and southern side, respectively. The palace had reception halls, a throne room (29 × 17 m), the church which housed the relics of Saint Paraskeva, as well as various living and administrative spaces for the tsar’s family, the boyars, servants and soldiers. Water was supplied from a special cistern. Seven graves have been discovered inside the church, and they are believed to belong to some of the tsars and to members of the family (see Figure 5). Near the tsar’s palace, the patriarchal church was erected and dedicated to the Ascension. Next to it, on the highest elevation of the Tsarevet hill, above the imperial palace, was the patriarchal palace, which was built on top of an older, 11th- to 12th-century church. The patriarchal palace covers an area of 3,000 square meters.<sup>73</sup> The two palaces were built to symbolize the relation

72 Zlatarski 1972, III, 344; Tarnanidis 1975, 34–35; Soustal 1991, 106; Podskalsky 2000, 313, 482; Biliarsky 2007a, 81–104; Biliarsky 2007b, 331–333, 337–338; Petkov 2008, 274–276, 439; Külzer 2008, 144, 350; Erdeljan 2009, 464; Angelov 2011, 109; Mureşan 2011, 746. Her relics were first transferred to Vidin, then to Belgrade, Constantinople, and eventually to Iaşi. To this day, they have remained in the latter city after being brought there in 1641 by the Moldavian Prince Basil Lupu (1634–1653).

73 Georgieva, Nikolova, Angelov 1973, 39–166; Angelov 1980, 17–45; Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 32–33, 43–63; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2010, 600–603; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 205–218, 229–230; Barakov 2015, 136–139.



FIGURE 5 *The throne hall in the palace of Tsarevets.*  
AUTHORS PHOTO.

between the spiritual and, beneath it, the secular authority. This symbolism derives directly from the Byzantine culture.<sup>74</sup> Both palaces and the patriarchal church were destroyed in 1393, when the Ottomans took the city (the church was rebuilt in 1981, on the occasion of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state).

Joachim I, the first patriarch of the Second Bulgarian Empire, had been a monk in a cave monastery located near the modern city of Ivanovo, 20 km south from Ruse.<sup>75</sup> One of the churches of that monastery is dedicated to the Archangel Michael and contains a fresco showing John Asan II crowned and blessed by Jesus Christ, much like a Byzantine emperor. The fresco has been painted after the tsar's abandonment of Catholicism.<sup>76</sup>

The victory of Klokotnitsa was celebrated with the building of a church dedicated to the Holy Forty Martyrs, whose feast day (March 9) coincides with that of the battle. The church is located on the bank of the river, to the south from the church dedicated to Saint Demetrius. The church was included in the Monastery of Great Lavra, which was later destroyed after the Ottoman

74 Gjuzelev 1994, 62–63; Murdzhiev 2008, 165.

75 Podskalsky 2000, 297–298; Petkov 2008, 285–286.

76 Cankova-Petkova 1978b, 104; Atanasov 1999, 150; Bakalova 2009, 243–244; Čilingirov 2011.



FIGURE 6 *The “40 Martyrs Church”*  
AUTHORS PHOTO.

conquest. The church, however, was converted into a mosque, which secured the preservation of some of the original architectural elements, thus making possible its modern reconstruction (see Figure 6).<sup>77</sup> Next to the column with the inscription commemorating the battle of Klokochnitsa is another column brought from Pliska, with an inscription commemorating the victories of Khan Omurtag (814–831).<sup>78</sup> Despite the latter being a pagan ruler, the juxtaposition of the inscription is a clear ideological message about the continuity of power from the First to the Second Bulgarian Empire. Since his power extended well over the territory once under the rule of Symeon, John Asan II could definitely call himself an autocrat (*samodržac*, “independent ruler”) and emperor, as indicated by an inscription on another column inside the Church of the Holy Forty Martyrs. In 1230, therefore, John Asan II became an autocrat like the emperors of Constantinople, which means that his empire was a legitimate successor of that destroyed by the crusaders in 1204.<sup>79</sup>

Another way in which John Asan II conspicuously modeled his image after that of the Byzantine emperors is the striking of his coins. Although he continued to strike “Bulgarian imitations,” after 1230, the emperor minted gold coins

77 Jireček 1876, 254–255; Bojadžiev 1971; Popov 1979; Popov 1985, 81–83; Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 113–134; Totev 2001; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 226–228.

78 Beševliev 1963, 247–260; Popov 1984, 7–8; Popov 1985, 80; Petkov 2008, 11; Dall’Aglio 2011b, 601.

79 Djurić 1980, 32.

modeled after *hyperpera* issued by the mint of Thessaloniki. His own mint was in Ohrid, a city conquered in 1230. John Asan II also struck billon coins inspired by Byzantine *trachea*, borrowing elements both from Thessalonican and from Nicaean issues. On his coins, as well as on his seals, the tsar was depicted as crowned by Saint Demetrios. After his death, the minting of gold coins stopped.<sup>80</sup>

Despite his hegemonic position in the Balkan Peninsula and the alliance with John III Vatatzes, John Asan II was not able to eliminate the Latin Empire. The population of Constantinople seems to have been aware of the danger posed by that alliance. According to a report prepared on March 26, 1234 by a group of Franciscan monks for the Pope, the Latins, who lacked the necessary forces, feared attacks both from the Emperor of Nicaea, and from *Arsanus rex Bachorum*. Their hope was a truce with John III Vatatzes, which in fact never happened.<sup>81</sup> Instead, in the summer of 1235, the Bulgarian-Nicaean armies besieged Constantinople. Although defended only by a small garrison under the command of John of Brienne (who had only 160 knights), the city withstood the attack, and drove the attackers away. After trying in vain to penetrate the defenses of the Golden Horn, the Nicaean fleet was partially destroyed by the Venetians, who had responded to the call for support. On December 16, 1235, the pope announced the victory to the king of Hungary, urging him to attack Bulgaria so as to provide support to Constantinople, which was once again besieged by the two schismatic enemies, John III Vatatzes and John Asan II. Their forces had regrouped in the Gallipoli Peninsula, and from there they launched a new attack on the capital, after the departure of the Venetian fleet. The second siege, which lasted well into the spring of 1236, was equally unsuccessful, because the Latins in Constantinople had now received assistance from Morea, as well as from Venice, Genoa and Pisa. On the other hand, Béla IV refused to get involved in the conflict, probably because he was related to both John Asan II and John III Vatatzes (he had married Mary, one of Theodore I Laskaris's daughters, while his sister, Anna Maria, was John Asan II's wife).<sup>82</sup>

80 Hendy 1969, 296–297; Metcalf 1979, 127–130, 288; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 119–123; Hendy 1999, 639–643; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 46.

81 *Disputatio*, 446 (FLHB IV, 38–39); Wolff 1969, 218; Gjuzelev 1977b, 148–149; Dall'Aglia 2009, 1010–1011; Angelov 2013, 278.

82 Hurmuzachi, Densuşianu 1887, 139–140 (nr. CIX) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 217 (no. 2872) = FLHB IV, 50–51 (“centum et sexaginta militibus tantum sociatis, contra dictos Grecos cum quadraginta et octo aciebus procedentes ad bellum, certamen aggre-diens adversus eos triumphum obtinuit, et ipsorum alios ensi devorandos exposuit, alios



Philippe Mouskés wrote the most detailed account of the first siege on the basis of the information that had reached Flanders. It confirms the information recorded in the papal letter of December 16, 1235, which Mouskés could not have known. The analysis of the two independent sources shows that John of Brienne led the attack of the 160 knights, accompanied by squires and sergeants. The shock wave of the heavy cavalry organized in three detachments broke through the forces commanded by John Asan II. Of his 48 battalions, 45 were defeated and 3 managed to flee:

I have lost count of the years passed/ While there was no peace, nor war;/  
Then, [John of Brienne] no longer summoned the contingents of soldiers  
from all over the world./ He kept his gold and his coin./ He let the mer-  
cenaries go / Either to their estates, or elsewhere./ Many more are clean-  
ing their weapons (they have done the same)./ As it wasn't wise, and it  
wasn't sensible (not to fight, not to call his armies for so long)./ But Vatace  
and King Ausen/ Micalis and the Cumans/ and also the Vlachs forth-  
with / and Toldre, a powerful man,/ of whom many have heard,/ came  
to Constantinople/ the imperial, the noble city,/to besiege King Jehan./  
They came in hundreds and thousands,/ For a man is yet to be born /  
To count them all, as many as cannot be known/ and when King Jehan  
found out/ he sent forth as many of his own as he could / but only had  
160 knights / and they had their squires./ And there were servants (or foot  
soldiers) astride/ in small numbers, but they proved faithful./ They took  
all the weapons of the Greeks / and armed their men well:/the footmen  
stayed inside (the citadel)./ And then the king took his men and created /  
three battle squads. And they got out (of the citadel)./ And King Aussen,  
stoutly,/ made 45 battle squads./ They faced each other forthwith, so it  
was told;/ The three battle squads stroke well/ So they defeated the 45./  
Only three escaped,/ The ones led by Ausen and Vatace.<sup>83</sup>

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solis tribus aciebus fuge presidio liberatis carceri mancipavit"); Albericus, ed. Pertz, 938 (FLHB IV, 183): "Anno 1236. Vastachius et Alsanus duo reges potentissimi, qui erant inimicem adversarii, facta pace inter se, ita quod filius Vastachii filiam debet habere Alsanii, Constantinopleim obsident"); Dandolo, 295; Zlatarski 1972, III, 390–392; Longnon 1949, 172–173; Wolff 1949, 219; Vasileva 1979, 86–87; Langdon 1985, 107–116; Božilov 1985, 83–84; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 139–141; Fine 1994, 130; Bredenkamp 1996, 221, 228–229; Achim 2008, 90; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1012–1013; Pecican 2010, 185.

- 83 Mouskés, 613–614 (v. 29031–29067): "Là ot esté ne sai qans ans/, Qu'il n'i ot pais faite ne gierre;/ Ainc perdi priés toute la terre./ Son or garda et ses deniers,/ Aler laissa les saudoiers/ U en lor tières u aillors./ S'empesa et les plusiors,/ Quar ce ne fu ne preus ne sens/ Mais Vatace et li rois Ausens / Li Micalis et li Coumain,/ Et li Blac ausi tout de plain/ Et li

The interpretation that Radu Șt. Ciobanu (Vergatti) gave to this passage is based on a serious misunderstanding of the text. He thought that “King Jehan” was besieging Constantinople, instead of being besieged in the city.<sup>84</sup> But *roi Jehan* is clearly John of Brienne. He was also puzzled by Toldre, “a powerful man,” without knowing that in Old French texts, such as Geoffroy de Villehardouin, Toldres is the Frenchized version of the Greek name Theodore. Mouskés clearly had in mind Theodore II Laskaris. Micalis can only be Michael II (1231–1267), the despot of Arta after the battle of Klokotnitsa (whose wife was Saint Theodora of Arta).<sup>85</sup> Michalis is also the name Geoffroy de Villehardouin employed for his father, Michael I Comnenos Doukas.<sup>86</sup> The principality of Epirus appears to have been part of the coalition put together by John Asan II (“King Aussen”) and John III Vatatzes (“Vatace”).

Once Constantinople was out of danger, some of John of Brienne’s soldiers left for Vlachia, for they have apparently not been paid (“Par avarisse avoit laissiés / Les bons siergans et dékaciés, / Et des cevaliers grant partie, / Ki passèrent outre en Blaquie”).<sup>87</sup> There is no information about what happened next to those Latin knights who pledged allegiance to John Asan II in 1236. Radu Șt. Ciobanu again misunderstood the passage, when believing that the knights in question had entered Vlachia in pursuit of the Vlachs.<sup>88</sup> He also took Mouskés’s reference to “avarisse” to apply to John Asan II, instead of John of Brienne, no doubt because he believed the former to be *roi Jehan*.<sup>89</sup>

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Toldres, uns om poisans / Loïrent dire aus ne sai quans; / Venut sont viers Costantinoble / L'empérial cité, la noble, / Pour le roi Jehan asségier. / Tant i vinrent C et milier, / Qu'encor n'est nés qui les péoist / Nombrier, jà tant n'es connuist. / Et quant li rois Jehans le sot, / Des siens manda quan que il pot, / Si n'ot blous que VIII<sup>xx</sup> cevaliers, / Et cil orent leur esquiers. / Et si eut siergans à ceval / Moult poi, mais il furent loïal. / Les armes de tous lor Grios present / Et leur gens bien armer en fisent: / La piétalle remest dedens. / Et li rois fist lors de ses gens / III batalles; s'en issi fors. / Et li rois Aussens, par effors, / XLV batailles fist. / Lues asanblèrent, si c'on dist; / Les III isi bien i férèrent / Que le XLV venquirent: / III seulement en escapèrent, / Q'Ausens et Vatace menèrent.” The English translation follows the Romanian version carefully prepared and kindly provided to me by Professor Tatiana-Ana Fluieraru (“Valahia” University, Târgoviște), to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. VIII<sup>xx</sup> means *huit vingt* (160), not 800, as Langdon 1985, 107 believed.

84 Ciobanu 1976, 253.

85 Nicol 1957, 128–133; Nicol 1984, 5–6; Fine 1994, 128; Bredenkamp 1996, 229–230; Osswald 2011, 78–79.

86 Geoffroy, c. 301 (ed. Faral, II, 108/109; transl. Fluieraru, 137).

87 Mouskés, 620–621 (v. 29246–29249); Wolff 1969, 219.

88 Ciobanu 1976, 254.

89 Ciobanu 1985, 171: “Ils ont su profiter de l'avarice de Jean Assen II et, la spéculant, car il n'avait pas récompensé ses soldats, ils ont réussi le vaincre et après le poursuivre vers Blakie.”

Although defeated under the walls of Constantinople, the allied managed to conquer Philippopolis and its hinterland either in 1236 or, more likely, in 1237 (“Quar li Blac quièrent Finepople,/ Et la tière ont regaégnie”)<sup>90</sup> The circumstances of the Latin conquest of the city (which had been already occupied by John Asan II in 1230) are unclear.<sup>91</sup> Mouskés also noted that the city of Constantinople continued to be threatened by *li Blacois et li Coumains*.<sup>92</sup>

The defeat at Constantinople in 1236 seems to have convinced John Asan II to switch sides one more time. In 1237, he broke his alliance with John III Vatatzes and went once again to the side of the Latins. On May 24, 1236, Pope Gregory IX had requested the archbishops of Esztergom and Kalocsa to excommunicate John Asan II, if he continued his attacks on the Latin Empire.<sup>93</sup> Less than a year later, John Asan II's attacks ceased out of his own initiative, without any intervention from the pope or from Hungary. The tsar asked John III Vatatzes to send his daughter, Helen, back, under the pretext of a family visit, but in reality his intention was to break the ties with the Empire of Nicaea.<sup>94</sup>

After John of Brienne's death (March 22, 1237), John Asan II began again to harbor hopes that he might assume power in Constantinople, as regent for Baldwin II. Even before learning of John of Brienne's death, he wrote to Pope Gregory IX to announce that he would be willing to return under the authority of the Church of Rome. His messages have not survived, but they are summarized in the pope's reply of May 21, 1237. The pope called John Asan II *dominus Blachorum et Bulgarorum*, clearly avoiding the use of the title of *imperator*. He sent Bishop Salvio de Perugia for negotiations. Ten days later, Gregory IX also wrote to King Béla IV, and requested his support in bringing John Asan II back to the Catholic faith. On June 1, the pope sent two more letters. In one of them, he requested all archbishops, bishops, abbots and all clergymen in *Bulgaria et Blachia* to make the ruler of their state return to the Roman Church and

90 Mouskés, 630, v. 29509–29510; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 146. Finepople or Finople is the Frenchized name of Philippopolis.

91 A Latin duchy of Finople existed there in 1228 (Tafel, *Urkunden*, II, 266 = FLHB IV, 36).

92 Mouskés, 630, v. 29524.

93 Hurmuzachi, Densușianu 1887, 142 (nr. CXI) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 391 (no. 3156) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 290 (no. 214) = FLHB IV, 51; Zlatarski 1972, III, 395–396; Gjuzeev 1977a, 48; Langdon 1985, 118; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 143; Bonev 1986, 107; Dimitrov 1997, 13; Dimitrov 1998, 139; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1014; Pecican 2010, 171.

94 *Regesten*, III, 16 (nr. 1758); Akropolites, c. 34 (ed. Heisenberg, 52–53; transl. Macrides, 197–198); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 479–480; FGHB VIII, 272); Pappadopoulos 1908, 7; Miller 1923, 489–490; Zlatarski 1972, III, 397–398; Longnon 1949, 180; Nicol 1966, 313; Wolff 1969, 219–220; Langdon 1985, 117; Hendrickx 1988, 125; Bartusis 1992, 24; Fine 1994, 131; Vásáry 2005, 63; Ducellier 2008, 792; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1014; Georgieva 2012, 436–437; Angelov 2013, 278.

to conclude peace with the Latin Empire. The second letter was addressed to John Asan II, again calling him *dominus Blachorum et Bulgarorum*. In his letter, Gregory urged John Asan II to make peace with the Latin Empire.<sup>95</sup>

The mention of Vlachs in the pope's correspondence with John Asan II, but not in that with Béla IV is remarkable. They have not been mentioned in papal correspondence since the days of Johannitsa. This of course has nothing to do with the supposed recognition of the role of the Vlachs in the Second Bulgarian Empire in the 1230s, as opposed to three decades earlier. The pope could not have in any case had knowledge of the changes taking place inside Bulgaria. Instead, the renewed interest in Vlachs may again be linked to the desire to bring John Asan II back into the Catholic camp. Knowing about their Roman origin, which Innocent III had already used to achieve the union, Gregory IX hoped that that part of the empire's population would remain faithful to Rome, because of Roman ancestry. As Nicolae-Şerban Tanaşoca has noted, the role of the Vlachs in the empire was only recognized during the union with Rome, because they were the logical binder of that union. Innocent III even encouraged them to think about themselves in such terms.<sup>96</sup> John Asan II, however, no longer needed the Vlach element for the legitimization of his power. After 1235, Rome was no longer the source of this legitimacy. To him, the support of the pope would have guaranteed peace on the border with Hungary, a prerequisite for achieving the final goal of his policy, his coronation as emperor of Constantinople.

In the summer of 1237, thousands of Cumans driven out by Mongols crossed the Danube in Bulgaria, warriors being accompanied by their families. John Asan II could not stop them, and they broke into Thrace and Macedonia through the passes across the Stara Planina Mountains, wreaking havoc and devastation everywhere. The inhabitants of smaller strongholds were either killed or captured. Some of these Cumans were allied with the Latin Empire, for they participated in a battle at Tzurullon against the Nicaeans. John Asan II put that city under siege, but lifted it when learning that his wife, his son and the patriarch had died, apparently as victims of a pandemic that had erupted in

95 Hurmuzachi, Densuşianu 1887, 159–162, 164–166 (nr. CXIX, CXXI, CXXIII, CXXIV) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 660, 672–674 (nr. 3694, 3716, 3719, 3720) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 302–303 (nr. 226) = FLHB IV, 55–63; Onciul 1968, I, 412; Andreescu 1938, 773; Zlatarski 1972, III, 398–400; Gjuzelev 1977a, 48–49; Vasileva 1979, 88; Holban 1981, 66; Langdon 1985, 118; Božilov 1985, 85; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 144; Papacostea 1993, 45–46; Iorgulescu 1995, 164; Dimitrov 1997, 13; Dimitrov 1998, 140; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1014–1017; Pecican 2010, 172.

96 Tanaşoca 2001, 129.

Tárnovo. Quickly interpreting the events as divine punishment for his betraying John III Vatatzes, his former, Orthodox ally, John Asan II resumed relations with the Nicaean ruler at the end of 1237, and returned Helen to Theodore Laskaris.<sup>97</sup>

Now a widower, John Asan II married Irene, the daughter of Theodore Comnenos Doukas, whom he freed from captivity on this occasion. Some historians believe that the tsar aimed at strengthen his relations with the Principality of Epirus, a rival of the Empire of Nicaea, but it seems that John Asan II, in George Akropolites's words, loved Irene as much as Anthony loved Cleopatra.<sup>98</sup>

In the early 1238, he initiated contact with the Emperor Frederick II, the great enemy of John of Brienne, the former emperor of Constantinople. Philippe Mouskés claims that John III Vatatzes and John Asan II promised Frederick that they would do homage to him as suzerain, something that may have appealed to Frederick's plans for a universal monarchy.<sup>99</sup> The Emperor of Nicaea helped Frederick II with troops that participated in the siege of Brescia.<sup>100</sup> The pope was furious about John Asan II's new alliance with the Empire of Nicaea, because he had really hoped that the Bulgarian ruler would return to the Church of Rome. He wrote to the king of Hungary on January 27, 1238 and asked him to launch a crusade against John Asan II, who had become a schismatic again and was now harboring heretics in his country (*receptat*

97 Akropolites, c. 35, 36, 38 (ed. Heisenberg, 53–57, 60–61; transl. Macrides, 199–201, 206); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 480–482; FGHB VIII, 272–274; FHDR III, 440/441); Nikephor Gregoras, II, 5 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 81; FHDR III, 500/501); Pappadopoulos 1908, 8; Miller 1923, 490; Zlatarski 1972, III, 400–403; Longnon 1949, 180; Ostrogorsky 1956, 462; Wolff 1969, 220–221; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 62; Asdracha 1976, 242; Vasileva 1979, 87–88; Soustal 1991, 107; Bartusis 1992, 26; Fine 1994, 131; Bredenkamp 1996, 233; Dimitrov 1998, 140; Vásáry 2005, 64; Ioniță 2005, 33; Spinei 2006, 444–445; Curta 2006, 388; Külzer 2008, 145; Uzelac 2008, 164; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 52–53; Spinei 2009, 167; Dall'Aglia 2009, 1017; Georgieva 2012, 437; Georgieva 2015, 354; Uzelac 2015a, 36–37.

98 Akropolites, c. 38 (ed. Heisenberg, 60–61; transl. Macrides, 206–207); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 483–484; FGHB VIII, 275); Albericus, ed. Pertz, 950 (FLHB IV, 185); Zlatarski 1972, III, 405–407; Nicol 1957, 134; Wolff 1969, 222; Božilov 1985, 87; Georgieva 1993, 119; Fine 1994, 133; Georgieva 1995, 170–171; Bredenkamp 1996, 181, 242; Osswald 2011, 75; Mladjov 2012, 485–486; Georgieva 2012, 438–439; Pavlov 2015, 363–364.

99 Mouskés, 642, v. 29858–29863 (“Nouvieles et si entendi/ Que Todres, Vatace et Auscens/ Et tout li Griu et leur assens/ Orent mandé l'emperéour/ De Roume, par moult grant amor/ Qu'il li feroient tout ommage”); *Regesten*, III, 17 (nr. 1760); Longnon 1949, 179; Vasiliev 1958, 528; Gjuzelev 1977a, 49; Vasileva 1979, 88; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 146.

100 Brezeanu 1978, 260.

*in terra sua hereticos*). Hungarian bishops were to offer indulgences to participants in the crusade, the same as those applying to crusades to the Holy Land.<sup>101</sup> The heretics whom John Asan II welcomed in his country came from Bosnia; they were not Bulgarian Bogomils, because it would not have been said about them that they had come from elsewhere. In order to avoid entering the jurisdiction either of Catholic Hungary or of Orthodox Serbia, the Bosnian clergy had formed a separate church, which preserved Catholicism, but also tolerated the Patarene heresy (a dualist heresy, similar to the Bogomilism).<sup>102</sup> Between 1235 and 1238, King Béla IV, which was also the suzerain of Bosnia, had actually crusaded against those heretics,<sup>103</sup> which must have forced some of them to flee to Bulgaria.

Baldwin II was also notified that the crusade against Bulgaria would also be to his advantage. For the first eight months of the year 1238, the pope pestered King Béla IV with letters to convince him to go to war against Bulgaria, which he was allowed to occupy (*quod intendit licite poterit occupare ac sana conscientia retinere*). The king kept on postponing departure, because he wanted to be granted full rights over establishing the ecclesiastical organization in the territories he was about to conquer (*Bulgariam et alias terras Assoeni occupare*).<sup>104</sup>

Béla IV's letter from June 7, 1238 reveals that besides Bulgaria, John Asan II ruled over other territories which the Hungarian king now wanted. This cannot be Cumania, as Hungary already had control of that. Most likely, Béla IV must have in mind the southern regions south of Bulgaria, where he could joined forces with the Latin Empire. For both pope and king, *terra* had a precise meaning, referring to a territory under the rule of a monarch.<sup>105</sup> The fear of engaging in a conflict with a powerful enemy, at a time when he had received information about an imminent Mongol invasion may explain why

101 Hurmuzachi, Densușianu 1887, 167 (nr. CXXV) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 875 (no. 4056) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 309 (no. 229) = FLHB IV, 64.

102 Loos 1973; Fine 1975, 148–157; Fine 1994, 146–147.

103 Fine 1994, 144; Stoyanov 2000, 215–217; Dall'Aglío 2009, 1008–1009, 1019.

104 Hurmuzachi, Densușianu 1887, 182–183 (nr. CXL) = FLHB IV, 69–72. See also Hurmuzachi, Densușianu 1887, 166–171, 173–179 (nr. CXXV–CXXIX, CXXXI–CXXXVII) = *Les registres de Grégoire IX*, II, 876–877, 1108–1110 (nr. 4058–4064, 4482, 4483–4487, 4490) = *Acta Honorii III et Gregorii IX*, 325–327 (nr. 248) = FLHB IV, 65–68, 74–79; Onciul 1968, I, 415–416, 626; II, 54–55; Andreescu 1938, 773–774; Zlatarski 1972, III, 403–405; Wolff 1969, 221; Gjuzeleu 1977b, 151; Vasileva 1979, 89; Holban 1981, 67–68; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 145, 147, 148; Papacostea 1993, 47–48; Fine 1994, 131; Iorgulescu 1995, 165–166; Kosztolnyik 1996, 125–127; Dimitrov 1997, 15–16; Dimitrov 1998, 141; Achim 2002, 127–128; Lower 2004, 54–58; Achim 2008, 91; Dall'Aglío 2009, 1018–1024; Pecican 2010, 173, 186.

105 Brezeanu 1989b, 4.

the crusade against Bulgaria was eventually abandoned. John Asan II decided to take a cautious approach as well. He granted right of passage in 1239 to Baldwin II who was returning from France with 700 knights and 30,000 soldiers (Akropolites mentions 60,000 soldiers, but Albericus's numbers are to be preferred). Two lead seals of Baldwin II have actually found in Pleven<sup>106</sup> and Popovo.<sup>107</sup> The Western army allied with the Cumans who had come in 1237 (now under the command of a Khan named Ionas and of another commander named Saronius<sup>108</sup>) took Tzurullon from the Nicaeans in May 1240. Although John Asan II did not participate in that war, George Akropolites accuses him of breaching the treaties with the Empire of Nicaea, and of not respecting his commitments. John Asan II was not in a position to oppose the passage of Baldwin II's army, both because it was a considerable force and because, if attacking it, he would have immediately faced retaliation from Hungary. In addition, he had no interest in facilitating the Empire of Nicaea's advance into Thrace.<sup>109</sup> John Asan II also responded favorably to the pope's demand to allow the passage of another crusading army, as indicated by a letter of January 13, 1240 from Béla IV to Gregory IX.<sup>110</sup>

The looming Mongol threat brought Hungary and Bulgaria together again. After the fall of Kiev on December 6, 1240, the Mongols were largely perceived as a major threat. Hungary and Bulgaria concluded an alliance for a common

106 Gjuzelev 2000, 43; Jordanov 2009, 108; Kănev, Totev 2015, 375. In the first edition of this book I supposed that the seal belonged to a message sent in 1257 to Rostislav Mihailovič (see next chapter). Now it is clear that the two pieces are related to the same event.

107 Kănev, Totev 2015, 374–380; Jordanov 2015, 225.

108 In 1241, Ionas's daughter married the regent Narjot de Toucy, and the two daughters of Saronius married the noblemen William of Merry and Baudouin of Hainaut (Albericus, ed. Pertz, 950); Hasdeu 1976, 699–701; Richard 1992, 117–118; Spinei 2006, 445; Uzelac 2008, 165; Pecican 2010, 178–180; Angold 2011, 59; Uzelac 2015a, 37–38; Uzelac 2015b, 64). Saronius's Greek name was Syrgianis, which derives from the Cuman name Sičgan (Vásáry 2005, 67–68, 120). The name Jonas, obviously not Cuman, cannot be explained.

109 Albericus, ed. Pertz, 946–947 (*Cum maxima difficultate terram Alsani transierunt*); Akropolites, c. 37 (ed. Heisenberg, 58; transl. Macrides, 203–204); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 482–483; FGHB VIII, 274–275); Longnon 1949, 181–182; Wolff 1969, 222; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 62–63; Gjuzelev 1975, 45; Gjuzelev 1977a, 49; Vasileva 1979, 89; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 148, 150; Hendrickx 1988, 136; Papacostea 1993, 48; Fine 1994, 132; Vásáry 2005, 64; Spinei 2006, 445; Achim 2008, 91–92; Dall'Aglio 2009, 1026; Pecican 2010, 173–174, 178–181; Giebfried 2013, 130.

110 FLHB IV, 80–81; Gjuzelev 1975, 46; Gjuzelev 1977a, 49; Gjuzelev 1977b, 151; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 149; Fine 1994, 133; Dimitrov 1997, 16–17; Dimitrov 1998, 142; Achim 2008, 103; Pecican 2010, 187.

defense.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, fearing the Mongols, 40,000 Cumans led by Kuten fled to Hungary in 1238. In March 1241, after having caused chaos in the southern parts of the kingdom, those Cumans crossed into Bulgaria, as indicated by Rogerius, the archdeacon of Oradea.<sup>112</sup> Another group of Cumans came to Bulgaria directly from areas north of the Black Sea, after the Mongols conquered their country in 1239. That much results from a later Arab source (Ibn Taghribirdī's *History of Malik al-Zāhir Baybars reign in Egypt*, written between 1410 and 1470), which was based on information from the work of Ibn Shaddād, who died in 1285, the *Important Values in the history of the Emirs of Syria and Jazira*. The passage refers to the biography of the founder of the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt, Baybars, who was born a Cuman somewhere in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.

When they (the Tatars) decided to go to their (the Cumans') land in 639 AH (12 July 1241–30 June 1242), and the [news] reached them (the Cumans), the latter wrote to A-n-s-khan (Asan han), the king of Vlachia (*malik awalāq*) that they were going to cross the sea of Sudaq (the Black Sea) [in order to] come to him so that he would grant them asylum from the Tartars. And he positively replied to them on the [request] and settled them in the valley between two mountains. And their travel to him took place in 640 AH (1 July 1242–20 June 1243). However, when [the peaceful life in] that location made quiet, he perfidiously acted against them and made a fierce attack on them; and he killed some of them and took [others] into captivity.<sup>113</sup>

According to Georgi Atanasov, the place between the two mountains where the Cumans have been settled is the region between the Stara Planina and the Babadag hills,<sup>114</sup> but such an interpretation contradicts the text, which clearly shows that those Cumans were settled in a valley. This must have been inside, rather than outside the Stara Planina, but nothing more precise may be extracted

111 Gjuzelev 1975, 46; Fine 1994, 132–133, 155; Dimitrov 1997, 17–19; Dimitrov 1998, 142–143; Jackson 2005, 61–62; Pecican 2010, 187.

112 Rogerius, c. 26 (ed. Bak, 136/137–138/139, 176/177; FLHB IV, 186); Hóman 1943, 132–134; Pálóczi-Horváth 1989, 47–51; Kosztolnyik 1996, 128–129; Vásáry 2005, 65; Jackson 2005, 61; Spinei 2006, 444, 612–613; Korobeinikov 2008, 391; Uzelac 2008, 165–166; Dall'Aglia 2008–2009, 52; Spinei 2009, 168; Zimonyi 2014, 338, 341; Uzelac 2015a, 39–41.

113 Korobeinikov 2008, 387, 390, 393, 398–400; Uzelac 2008, 164; Spinei 2009, 167; Uzelac 2015a, 36–37. The Hijri date 640 is wrong, the real one being AD 1239–1240, as Ciocîltan 1992, 1117–1118 has shown.

114 Atanasov 2010, 26, 420.



from this passage. According to Victor Spinei, John Asan II was afraid that those Cumans would wreak havoc, much like those of 1237.<sup>115</sup> His hostile attitude towards Cumans may have been compounded by the devastations brought by the Cumans coming from Hungary. The Cumans were no longer regarded as allies, but as a rather uncomfortable neighbor. Learning about their betrayal of the king of Hungary, John Asan II may have thus taken his precautions.

Shortly afterwards, however, he died. He was the first and only member of the Asanid dynasty to die of natural causes, i.e., not assassinated or otherwise overthrown. As George Akropolites noted, he “excelled among barbarians not only compared to his people but also to strangers, for he was most gracious to those foreigners who came to him, especially to the Romei.” The Byzantine historian dated his death shortly after the death of the Empress Irene, the second wife of Manuel Comnenos Doukas. She died six months after the appearance of a comet that was visible for three months. Another chronological reference in Akropolites’s text is a solar eclipse that foretold the death of the empress. That eclipse took place on June 3, 1239.<sup>116</sup> According to current astronomical calculations the only comet that was visible from 1239 to 1242 in the region of Constantinople was the one that appeared on January 27, 1240 (Julian calendar). This is therefore the reference point for dating Irene’s death to August 1240. That is also the *terminus post quem* for the death of John Asan II.

Albericus knew that John Asan II’s death had taken place in 1241, before June 24, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, when a two-year truce was agreed between Baldwin II, John III Vatatzes and Kaliman (Coloman), John Asan II’s son.<sup>117</sup> The renewal of the treaty with John III Vatatzes at the beginning of Kaliman’s reign is also mentioned by George Akropolites. John Asan II could not therefore have died on June 24, as many believe. He was already dead by then, and his son had succeeded him in power. Coloman was the son of Empress Anna Maria, and therefore a nephew of the Hungarian king Béla IV. He was born in 1234 (according to George Akropolites, Kaliman was 12 years old

<sup>115</sup> Spinei 2009, 167.

<sup>116</sup> Akropolites, c. 39 (ed. Heisenberg, 64; transl. Macrides, 211–212); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 485; FGHB VIII, 276). The date of the eclipse is from the NASA five millenium catalogue of solar eclipses (<http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEcat5/SE1201-1300.html>, visit of March 28, 2016).

<sup>117</sup> Albericus, ed. Pertz, 950 (FLHB IV, 185): “Circa festum sancti Iohannis Alsanus rex mortuus est (...). Ceterum ab hoc festo sancti Iohannis in biennium firmaverunt Constantinopolitani treugas ad Colmannum Alsani filium et ad Vastachium et eius filium.” See Gjuzelev 1975, 47; Gjuzelev 1977b, 152; Božilov 1985, 86; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 153; Hendrickx 1988, 137; Dimitrov 1998, 143; Vászary 2005, 70.

in 1246<sup>118</sup>). Philippe Mouskés places the news about the death of *rois Ausens* (John Asan II) after the election of Pope Celestine IV, an event that occurred on October 25, 1241.<sup>119</sup> Nothing is known about how much time had elapsed between the death of the emperor and the moment when news arrived in Flanders about that. Nor can the sequence of events be established with any degree of certainty. However, there is no reason to challenge the dating which can be inferred from Albericus's chronicle. He took as reference point the conclusion of the armistice, an event that occurred in Constantinople. Albericus wrote at the time of those events, for his chronicle ends in 1241. John Asan II's death must therefore be placed sometimes in May or June 1241, after the conquest of Hungary by the Mongols.

The great invasion of Europe that Batu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, led in the spring of 1241 was carried out in several directions, which hit Poland, Moravia, and Hungary, respectively. The details of the expedition have been painstakingly reconstructed on the basis of a thorough confrontation of Western and Oriental sources. Hungary was the main target of an invasion, the preparation of which had started in 1235. The kingdom ruled by Béla IV must have been seen as the only territory where the Mongols could maintain a modicum of life similar to that in the steppe lands, and as a main point of entry into Central and Western Europe. King Béla IV had been warned about the Mongols' intentions and has taken steps to strengthen the defense of the Carpathian Mountains, but those proved to be of no use. The timber barriers in the mountain passes and elsewhere (*indagines*) were destroyed with the axes of the local men, whom the Mongols have forcefully coopted in the invasion. The army corps led by Kadan, Büri and Böček attacked Transylvania and the Banat of Severin in March 1241. The Romanian, Szekler, and Saxon border guards tried to defend the passes, but to no avail. After the devastation of Transylvania, the Mongol armies entered Hungary, where they rejoined Batu's army, which had come through the Verecke pass in the Beskidy Mountains, the easiest way to enter Hungary from the north. Abandoned by the Cumans, the Hungarian army was crushed in the battle of Muhi, on the Sajó River (April 11th, 1241).<sup>120</sup>

118 Akropolites, c. 43 (ed. Heisenberg, 72; transl. Macrides, 225); Božilov 1985, 104. His name was of Hungarian origin (Stankov 2015, 364).

119 Mouskés, 673 (v. 30747–30750): *De Coustantinoble revint nouvelle, ki moult bien avint, Que mors estoit li rois Ausens, Ki moult ot valor et haus sens* ("From Constantinople came the news that not so long ago the very brave and wise king Asan has died").

120 Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 29–58; Hóman 1943, 135–143; Panaitescu 1969, 263–264; Decei 1978, 194–195, 201–206; Gonța 1983, 42–71; Ciocîltan 1992, 111–113; Papacostea 1993, 94–97;

John Asan II's reign ended at a moment of complete disaster not only for his state, but for Eastern Europe as a whole. During the following decades, relations with the Mongols will define the history of the states in the region, especially Hungary and Bulgaria. Although the territorial integrity of the empire was not affected by the Mongols, the devastation that they produced, even if to a lesser extent than that in Transylvania and Hungary, marked the beginning of a steady decline, both because of demographic losses and of the destruction brought to the urban economy.<sup>121</sup>

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Kosztolnyik 1996, 137–140, 151–179; Jackson 2005, 63–64; Spinei 2006, 622–630, 634–642; Curta 2006, 409–411; Achim 2008, 95–102; Zimonyi 2014, 342–345.

121 Atanasov, Pavlov 1995, 235, 239.

## The Decline of the Asanid State (1241–1280)

After losing both his parents when he was only seven years old, Kaliman (Coloman) reigned with a regent, whose identity remains unknown. If the *sevastokrator* Alexander, John Asan II's brother was still alive, his experience would have certainly recommended him for the job. Empress Irene, Kaliman's stepmother, may have also been the regent, but it is not certain that she stayed in Tărnovo after John Asan II's death. She may have in fact left for Thessaloniki, to her brother, Demetrios Doukas. She was certainly there in December 1246, although it is not known for how long.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1242, the army of Kadan (one of Great Khan Ögödei's sons) left for Dalmatia, in pursuit of King Béla IV, who had taken refuge on an island. The Hungarian king escaped, but the Mongol army devastated Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, and then entered Bulgaria. The information on the campaign, although scarce, derives from two independent sources, Rogerius and Thomas of Spalato.<sup>2</sup> Both mention that Kadan's army entered Bulgaria from Serbia, while Thomas knows that Batu and Kadan joined their forces in Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup> An annotation in Greek on the margins of a manuscript now in Vatican (the manuscript contains the works of Saint Basil the Great) specifies that the book was purchased by a certain Theodore Grammatikos after the Tartar invasion of Bulgaria, in 6751 (1242/1243), during the reign of Kaliman Asan, John

1 Akropolites, c. 45 (ed. Heisenberg, 82–83; transl. Macrides, 237–238); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 497; FGHB VIII, 282); Zlatarski 1972, III, 420–421; Božilov 1985, 104; Fine 1994, 156; Georgieva 1995, 171–175; Georgieva 2010, 116–117; Pavlov 2015, 364.

2 *Vlachia* plundered by *Tartari* is also mentioned in the chronicle of Caroldo (234), but that is in fact a territory north of the Danube, inhabited by that *colonia delli Romani negri che dicono Valacchi* recorded in another part of the chronicle (41)—an information for the first time noticed by Iosipescu 1979, 675–677.

3 Rogerius, c. 38 (ed. Bak, 214/215; FLHB IV, 187): “Cadan rex (...) destruxit Boznam, regnum Rascie et inde in Bulgariam pertransivit.” Thomas Spalatensis, ed. Perić, 302/303; FLHB IV, 268): “Iterum autem totam Serviam percurrentes in Bulgariam devenerunt ibi enim uterque dux, Bathus et Caydanus, condixerant suarum turmarum copias recensere; Dandolo, 299 (the Tatars occupied regnum Bulgariae.” Hóman 1943, 152–153; Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 60–65; Decei 1978, 206; Božilov 1985, 104–105; Kosztołnyik 1996, 183; Curta 2006, 412; Jackson 2005, 65; Korobeinikov 2008, 392; Achim 2008, 104; Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 85; Zimonyi 2014, 344–346; Uzelac 2015a, 47–50.

Asan's son.<sup>4</sup> One cannot date the invasion with more precision, because nothing is known about how long after the invasion was the book purchased.

The attack on Bulgaria is also mentioned in the history of Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din, who wrote the official version of the Mongol military campaigns. After returning from Dalmatia, Kadan “conquered the Ulak cities of Tirnin (Qrqin) and Kila (Qilah), after great battles”. Aurel Decei, who first noted this passage, believed that the cities in question were in Vlachia (*Ulak* is the Arab and Persian form of the name *Vlach*, taken from the Cumans)—Tărnovo and Chilia.<sup>5</sup> But the Persian scholar wrote about the hard battles that the Mongols had to fight in order to conquer the two cities, which is a way to say that they put under siege (there are documented cases of Mongols using war machines for destroying walls<sup>6</sup>). It is also worth mentioning that an author from a faraway country knew that the state had been established by the Vlachs, even though they were at that time no longer in power.

Tirnin's identification with Tărnovo is indisputable, but the second city cannot be Chilia. It is true that the name is similar, but in 1242 Chilia was not a city worth besieging. Aurel Decei knew, of course, Nicolae Iorga's old study on Byzantine Chilia,<sup>7</sup> but Silvia Baraschi<sup>8</sup> subsequently demonstrated that the Byzantine sources do not attest Chilia in Dobrudja during the 12th and 13th centuries (other cities by the same name existed in Thrace and Bithynia). The port of Chilia first appears in the 1296 portulan “Compasso da Navigare,” which is based on another map from mid-13th century.<sup>9</sup> Byzantine sources begin to refer to Chilia only in 1321–1323, when the town is mentioned among possessions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Initially, Chilia only had the role of a storage and trade center for goods unloaded at Licostomo, a nearby port.<sup>10</sup>

4 Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 71; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 425; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 65; Schreiner 1985 (FGHB IV, 133); Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 85; Uzelac 2015a, 51.

5 Decei 1978, 206–207; Ciociltan 1992, 1109–1110, 1113–1114; Mishin 1997, 42; Spinei 2006, 655; Curta 2006, 412; Korobeinikov 2008, 395; Giebfried 2013, 131; Zimonyi 2014, 344; Uzelac 2015a, 51. The text does not make the Mongols cross the river at Kule or Kile, as wrongly indicated by Iosipescu 2006, 52–53 (see also Iosipescu 2013a, 109).

6 For instance Rogerius, c. 34 and 37 (ed. Bak, 200/201, 212/213).

7 Iorga 1900, 32–35. The identification was disputed by Bănescu 1928.

8 Baraschi 1981a, 473–484.

9 The city was located in the 13th–15th centuries at Chilia Veche, on the right bank of the Danube. The Chilia fortress on the left bank (the present-day city of Kilia, in Ukraine) was built by the Moldavian prince Stephen the Great in 1479, because the defense of the fortress on the opposite bank was no longer possible.

10 The name *Chilia* derives from the Greek *kelion* (“merchandise store”), not from *kellion* (“monk cell”).

The subsequent urban development cannot be dated before a Genoese colony was established in 1352.<sup>11</sup> Silvia Baraschi believed that Kila was Anchialos.<sup>12</sup> Her solution has not been taken into account by any of the subsequent studies that continued to treat Kila as Chilia.<sup>13</sup> Baraschi's solution is, however, the most credible.<sup>14</sup> Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu, who also rejected Chilia as a solution, believes that Anchialos was neither an important trade center in Bulgaria, worth besieging, nor on the main road taken by the Tatars to (or from) Dalmatia.<sup>15</sup>

Using a new edition of Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din's work, the American-Russian historian Dimitri Korobeinikov proposed a new reading of the passage, where the two names, *Qrqin* and *Qila* are in fact a single one, *Qustinutil*, meaning Kiustendil.<sup>16</sup> His interpretation ignores the fact that that name was given by the Ottomans to the city of Velbužd in the late 14th century. For the time being, therefore, Baraschi's identification with Anchialos remains the best solution. In al-Idrisi's mid-12th-century geography, Anchialos appears as *Ahilu*, and in 13th-century Venetian documents as *Laquilo*. In the Ottoman chronicle entitled *Düsturname*, the city is called *Kili*.<sup>17</sup> As the port was one of the most important ones on the western coast of the Black Sea, it was sufficiently rich to attract raids. Ibn Said al-Maghribi's geographic work written in 1250 (*Kitāb al-Jugrāfiyā*) also mentions the Mongol attack on the Vlach city of Târnovo (*Tarnabu*).<sup>18</sup>

From Bulgaria, the Mongols went further south. They entered "Greece," that is the Latin Empire. Only strongholds with better defenses escaped the devastations. Baldwin II first scored a victory, but was then defeated. The information comes from a chronicle written in the mid-14th century in the Neuberg Abbey in Vienna (*Chronicon Claustro-Neoburgense*): "The Tatars and the Cumans, entering Greece, laid waste to the entire country, with the exception of the citadels and cities with strong defenses. The king of Constantinople,

11 Iliescu 1978; Papacostea 1978; Baraschi 1981b, 318–319, 323–324, 337–339; Diaconu 1986; Iliescu 1994, 230, 238–258; Diaconu 1995–1996.

12 Baraschi 1981b, 323.

13 Iosipescu 1985, 22; Ciocîltan 1992, 1114, 1116 (possible); Papacostea 1993, 98; Atanasov, Pavlov 1995, 233; Mishin 1997, 47; Curta 2006, 412; Achim 2008, 104; Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 86; Rădvan 2010, 344–345, 506; Atanasov 2010, 29; Iosipescu 2013a, 109.

14 Spinei 2006, 655 rejected the identification with Chilia, but without offering an alternative.

15 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 71.

16 Korobeinikov 2008, 395.

17 Diaconu 1983; Soustal 1991, 176.

18 Norris 1994, 218–219.

named Baldwin, confronted them, being victorious in the first battle and suffering defeat in the second one.”<sup>19</sup>

A similar information also appears in the chronicle of the Christian Syrian scholar Gregory Abul Faraj, also known as Bar-Hebraeus. Although the account is erroneously dated in 1232, it seems to refer to the same Mongol attack on the Latin Empire: “And the Khan continued to wax strong. And he prepared to attack Constantinople from the quarter of the Bulgarians. And the kings of the Franks heard of this, and they gathered together and they met Batu in battle, and they broke him and made him flee.”<sup>20</sup>

Upon their return from “Greece,” the armies of Batu and Kadan plundered Bulgaria one more time. Archaeological research and the study of coin hoards shows clear destruction caused by the 1242 attack in the citadels of Tărnovo, Dristra, Preslav, Šumen, Varna, Červen, Loveč, Svišov, and several others. Based on such information, the attack came from Serbia on two directions, namely one of them the valley of the Iskăr River and from Loveč to Tărnovo. From there, the Mongols spread in all directions, including the seashore.<sup>21</sup> The town on the Păcuilui Soare Island was destroyed.<sup>22</sup> As shown in Chapter 10, archaeological investigations have revealed levels of destruction in three other strongholds in northern Dobrudja—Turcoaia, Isaccea and Nufăru—that were part of Bulgaria at that time. They must have been on the route that the Mongols followed in 1242 (see Map 7).

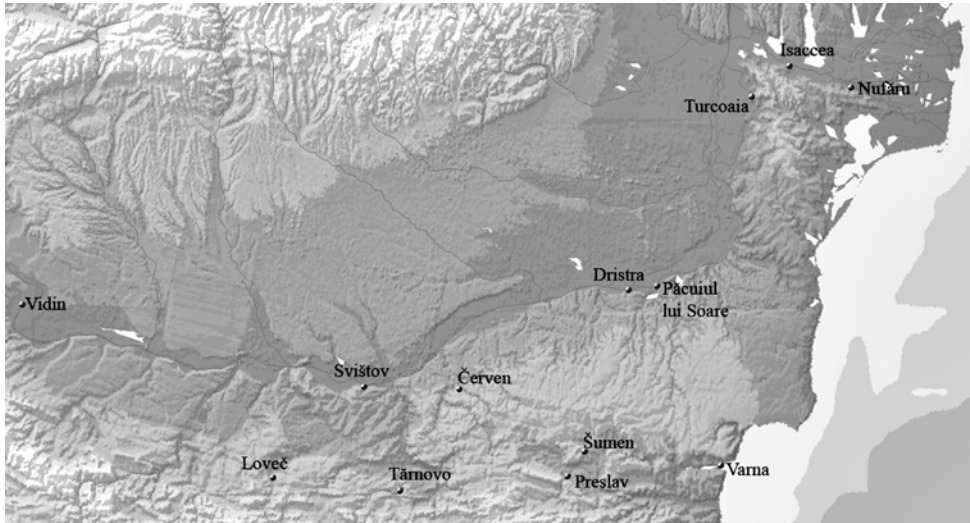
Judging from the information in Philippe Mouskés’s work, a battle must have taken place in a mountain pass in the Stara Planina upon the return of the Mongols from the Latin Empire: “News of the Tatars arrived, with great joy in the entire world, that the king of Vlach country defeated them in a pass. On the other hand, the Duke of Bavaria, with the armies under his banner, also defeated them. Both have lost prominent men” (“Des Tartares revint noviele/ Ki par tot le monde fu bieles./ Que li rois de la tière as Blas/ Les ot descomfis à I pas/, D’autre part li dus de Baiwière,/ Il et sa route et sa bannière/ Les

19 Rauch 1793, II, 245: “Tartari et Chumani (. . .) intrantes Greciam totam terram illam depopulabant exceptis castellis et civitatibus valde munitis. Rex vero Constantinopolitanus nomine Paldwinus congressus est cum eis, a quo primo victi in secunda congressione victus est ab eis.” Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 71; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 63; Gonța 1983, 80; Richard 1992, 116; Jackson 2005, 65; Vásáry 2005, 70; Achim 2008, 104; Giebfried 2013, 132–133; Uzelac 2015a, 52; Uzelac 2015b, 65.

20 Barhebraeus, 398.

21 Atanasov, Pavlov 1995, 235–238; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 72–73; Spinei 2006, 656; Uzelac 2015a, 56.

22 Baraschi 1987, 126.



MAP 7 Places attacked by the Mongols in 1242.

ot descomfis ausement./ D'ambes pars perdirent grant gent").<sup>23</sup> The defeat inflicted upon the Mongols by the duke of Bavaria, Otto II Wittelsbach, is also mentioned in the annals of English abbey in Tewkesbury ("dux Baverensis multos (Tartari) interfecit et in fluminis rivo praecipitavit").<sup>24</sup>

In mountain warfare, the Mongols were vulnerable, because they could not deploy their forces. The Bulgarian army managed to play on the Mongols the same strategy as that resulting in the victory at Tryavna in September 1190. The unnamed king of the Vlachs cannot be John Asan II (*Assens's* death is in fact mentioned in the text prior to the passage concerning the battle in the mountain pass). Kaliman was already the ruler, and the victory gained by an unknown commander was attributed to him, since he was a minor.<sup>25</sup> There can be no doubt that the Vlachs in question are those of Bulgaria, to whom the author from Tournai always refers as *Blas*. There was no Romanian state in the lands north of the river Danube, in Wallachia, which could have organized the resistance

23 Mouskés, 681 (v. 30959–30967); Sacerdoțeanu 1933, 39; Panaitescu 1969, 264; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 63; Decei 1978, 207; Spinei 2006, 656; Achim 2008, 104. Uzelac 2008, 168–170 thinks that the attack took place in 1241, as punishment against the Cuman traitors.

24 *Annales monastici*, 118; Jackson 2005, 67.

25 Decei 1978, 207; Gonța 1983, 74; Achim 2008, 104.



against the Mongols.<sup>26</sup> In an attempt to explain away this relatively late mention of a king of the Vlachs, Khristo Dimitrov believes that the passage refers to John Asan II winning a victory against the Mongols somewhere in Walachia in March 1241, when the Mongols were about to enter Transylvania.<sup>27</sup> Petăr Koledarov's solution is equally preposterous: to him the *Blas* are Bulgarians.<sup>28</sup> Radu Șt. Vergatti, on the other hand, believes that the king of the Vlachs who defeated the Mongols was no other than Bezerenbam mentioned in the history of Fazlallah Rashid ad-Din. Hasdeu first identified that character with a member of the (future) Basarab dynasty.<sup>29</sup> Hasdeu's idea was accepted by some, but in 1973 Aurel Decei demonstrated that Bezerenbam was a Polish lord. Vergatti simply ignored the facts.

Batu and Kadan crossed the Danube with their armies, since the Grand Khan Ögö dai had died on December 11, 1241 in Karakorum, and the succession struggle had begun. Batu, who was Jöchi's son (Genghis Khan's eldest son) was directly involved in struggle, but because of his hostility to Güyük (the favorite of the Grand Khan's widow, Törägänä), he did not attend the *quriltai*. Instead, he preferred to rule over the territory that had once been under the rule of the Cumans (Kipčak). Batu's polity stretched from the mouths of the Danube to central Siberia, and came to be called the Golden Horde, with the capital in Sarai, on the Volga River.<sup>30</sup>

Following the Mongol invasion of 1242, Bulgaria, although not occupied, had to pay tribute, much like Cumania (Moldavia and Wallachia). This is confirmed by William of Rubruck, who traveled through the Mongol empire between 1253 and 1255.

But westwards from the mouth of Tanais [Don] as far as the Danube everything is theirs; and even beyond the Danube in the direction of Constantinople, Blakia—Assan's territory—and the little Bulgaria as far

26 *Contra*: Stănescu, Pascu 1962, 122–123; Panaitescu 1969, 264; Florescu, Pleșia 1971, 6. See, more recently, Mărculeț 2004–2005, 147–148, who sees the *Blas* as Romanians from the bishopric of the Cumans, or those who defended the Oituz pass in cooperation with the Szeklers.

27 Dimitrov 1997, 19; Dimitrov 1998, 143.

28 Koledarov 1979, 64.

29 Ciobanu 1976, 255–256. Ciobanu 1985, 174–175 dropped the reference to Bezerenbam, but maintained the location of the king of the Vlachs in Wallachia north of the river Danube.

30 Grousset 1970, 257–269, 392–396; Morgan 1986, 140–143; Jackson 2005, 72, 114; Spinei 2006, 648, 664, 666; Uzelac 2015a, 60–69.

as Sclavonia,<sup>31</sup> all pay them tribute; and over and above the tribute stipulated, in recent years they have further levied on each household one axe and all the unwrought iron that has been found.<sup>32</sup>

Rubruck suggests that the tribute was collected from some time, since the confiscation of iron objects was a comparatively recent measure. That explains Sergiu Iosipescu's wrong assumption, according to which the tribute was not imposed upon Bulgaria after the invasion (which he wrongly dates to 1243), but after subsequent attacks.<sup>33</sup> The tribute paid by Vlachs and Bulgarians is also mentioned in another passage concerning to Khan Sartaq of the Golden Horde, Batu's son: "The Russians, the Blac, the Bulgars of Little Bulgaria, the people of Soldaia, the Kerkis and the Alans, who all visit him when making for his father's court and take presents for him" (*Rutenorum, Blacorum, Bulgarorum minoris Bulgarie, Soldainorum, Kerkisorum, Alanorum, qui omnes transeunt per eum quando vadunt ad curiam patris sui, deferentes ei munera*).<sup>34</sup>

King Louis IX's envoy William of Rubruck had detailed knowledge about the organization of the Mongol empire, since his mission was not only to attempt to convert the Mongols to Christianity, but also to gather intelligence. It is important to note that he employs the term *Blakia* for "Assan's territory," applying, as it were, a term familiar to his audience since the days of the Fourth Crusade.<sup>35</sup> Dimitre Onciul and Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu wrongly believed that *Blakia* was in the lands north of the Danube, of which the "land of the Vlachs,"

31 Other editions and translations have the wrong form *Solonoma*, supposedly a corrupted form of *Salonic*. See for instance Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 266 (doc. CC1); Onciul 1968, I, 629; Iosipescu 2013a, 109.

32 William of Rubruck, I, 5 (ed. Michel-Wright, 216; Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 265–266; transl. Jackson, 65–66; FLHB IV, 195): "Ab orificio Tanais versus occidentem usque ad Danubium totum est eorum, etiam ultra Danubium, versus Constantinopolim, Blakia, que est terra Assani et minor Bulgaria usque in Sclavoniam, omnes solvunt eis tributum. Et etiam ultra tributum conductum sumpserunt annis nuper transactis de qualibet domo securim unam et totum ferrum quod invenerunt in massa." Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 42, 90, 97, 158; Zlatarski 1972, III, 425; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 64; Decei 1978, 207–208; Ghiață 1981, 1865; Ciocîltan 1992, 117; Vásáry 2005, 70; Spinei 2006, 678; Achim 2008, 107; Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 88; Uzelac 2015a, 73–77; Uzelac 2015b, 62, 67–68.

33 Iosipescu 1980, 46.

34 William of Rubruck, XVIII, 1 (ed. Michel-Wright, 263; transl. Jackson, 126; FLHB IV, 221); Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 48, 64, 161; Papacostea 1993, 101; Spinei 2006, 678.

35 Ciocîltan 1983, 113–116.

or Vlașca (a region to south-west from Bucharest) was supposedly a remnant.<sup>36</sup> But the text shows clearly that all three countries—Blakia, Little Bulgaria, and Sclavonia—are across the Danube, in the Balkans. Rubruck even mentions that they had all been once part of the Byzantine Empire (“Alia possunt scire per cronica, quia constat quod ille provincie, post Constantinopolim, que modo dicuntur Bulgaria, Blakia, Sclavonia, fuerunt provincie Grecorum”).<sup>37</sup> Anca Ghiăță is equally wrong when attributing the territory (*terra*) to the Vlachs, not to “Assan,” in order to make it look as if Rubruck had in mind the lands north of the river Danube.<sup>38</sup> *Blakia* can only be the territory between the Danube and the Stara Planina,<sup>39</sup> while *minor Bulgaria* is Thrace (to William of Rubruck *Bulgaria maior* was Volga Bulgharia) and *Slavonia* is Serbia. Where did he find this information? Rubruck was from Flanders, and it is quite possible that Philippe Mouskés and the later *Chronique de Flandre* inspired his usage. One cannot exclude the possibility that he had knowledge of Geoffroy de Villehardouin’s *Conquest of Constantinople*.

In addition to the domination of the Golden Horde, which took the form of the payment of tribute, Bulgaria was also confronted with profound change in the balance of powers in the Balkan Peninsula. In the fall of 1242, the Empire of Nicaea subdued the small “empire” of Thessalonica ruled by John, the son of Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas (after the city’s surrender, he renounced the imperial insignia, receiving the title of Despot from John III Vatatzes).<sup>40</sup> Hungary, on the other hand, although severely affected by the Mongol invasion, intervened in Bulgarian politics, taking advantage of the young age of the tsar (who was related to Béla IV). This was consistent with Pope Innocent IV’s insistence upon bringing Bulgaria back under the authority of the Church of Rome. In a letter of March 21, 1245, the pope asked Kaliman to renounce the schism, and invited him to send delegates for the council that was about to take place in Lyons. The pope addressed his letter to *illustri Colomanno in Bulgaria*

36 Onciul 1968, I, 405–406, 424, 425, 605, 629; Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 100–101. A similar opinion at Zlatarski 1972, III, 374.

37 William of Rubruck, XXI, 5 (ed. Michel-Wright, 276; Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 273; transl. Jackson, 140; FLHB IV, 229); Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 97, 163.

38 Ghiăță 1981, 1868.

39 The same opinion at Cihodaru 1977, 77 and Vásáry 2005, 30.

40 Akropolites, c. 40 (ed. Heisenberg, 65–67; transl. Macrides, 215–216); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 486–488; FGHB VIII, 276–278); Miller 1923, 491–492; Ostrogorsky 1956, 463; Nicol 1957, 137–139; Nicol 1966, 315; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 153; Nicol 1993, 22; Bredenkamp 1996, 257–260; Treadgold 1997, 725; Osswald 2011, 77; Giebfried 2013, 134.

*imperanti*,<sup>41</sup> but it is clear that his message was for those Bulgarian noblemen who surrounded Kaliman, and who may have been inclined to resume the policy of good relations with the papacy and with Hungary. Innocent IV seems to have counted on Bulgaria turning Catholic, in order to build bridges between Catholic states threatened by the Mongols (against whom the Council of June 28–July 17, 1245 was convened precisely in order to organize the defense of Christian Europe). As Hungary continued to hold the Banat of Severin, the border between the two states was the same as that during John Asan II's lifetime and rule.

However, after ruling for five years, Kaliman died at the age of 12, either in August or in September 1246. George Akropolites has two versions of events: Kaliman either died of a disease, or was poisoned by his enemies. Akropolites could not tell which one of those possibilities was closer to truth, but the assassination may have well been orchestrated by his stepmother, Irene, whose son, Michael, became the new tsar, although he was a minor as well (he must have been 7 or 8 years old<sup>42</sup>). The Bulgarian Patriarch Bessarion, who had only served for several months, also died in September 1246. It appears that he was in favor of the idea that Bulgaria should return to the union with the Church of Rome. Even if one ignores the coincidence in time of Kaliman and Bessarion's deaths, it is clear that power in Bulgaria was now in the hands of pro-Orthodox group that was hostile both to Hungary and to Catholicism.<sup>43</sup> Who exactly ruled during Michael's minority remains unknown. His mother Irene could have done so, but she may not have been in Tărnovo at that time, because, as mentioned above, she is known to have been in Thessaloniki, only three months after Michael became tsar. Some have assumed that power was exercised by the *sevastokrator* Peter, Michael's brother-in-law.<sup>44</sup> He is mentioned in a 1253 document, to which I will return later.

Soon after the coronation of Michael Asan (who ruled between 1246 and 1257), perhaps taking advantage of the political instability in Bulgaria, John III Vatatzes attacked the empire. He could operate at ease in the West, because

41 Hurmuzaki, *Densuşianu* 1887, 225–227 (doc. CLXXV) = *Acta Innocentii IV*, XXVII, 43–47 (doc. 20); Zlatarski 1972, III, 426–427; Gjuzelev 1977a, 50; Božilov 1985, 105; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 155; Dimitrov 1997, 20–21; Dimitrov 1998, 145; Achim 2002, 123; Achim 2008, 123.

42 Mladjov 2012, 486 has demonstrated that he was born most likely in 1239.

43 Akropolites, c. 43 (ed. Heisenberg, 72–73; transl. Macrides, 225); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 491; FGHV VIII, 278); Zlatarski 1972, III, 428; Božilov 1985, 105, 106; Dimitrov 1997, 21–22; Dimitrov 1998, 153–154; Achim 2008, 135; Georgieva 2010, 117.

44 Zlatarski 1972, III, 429–430; Fine 1994, 156. For Peter, see also Savčeva 1979, 53; Božilov 1985, 106, 112–113; Teoteoi 1989, 87.

in the eastern parts of the Second Bulgarian Empire, defense had been left to the Seljuk Turks established there in the fall of 1243. Between September and November 1246, the Nicaean army therefore occupied a large territory in Thrace and in Macedonia (see Map 8). First, the Nicaeans conquered Serres, which was defended by a Bulgarian commander named Dragotas, who came from Melnik. Dragotas surrendered, because the ramparts of the city were largely damaged and difficult to defend, and because he had found out about the tsar's death. He was also willing to help in the conquest of his hometown of Melnik.<sup>45</sup> In fact, once in Melnik with the Nicaeans, Dragotas contacted one of the city's most influential men, Nikolaos Manglavites, who began persuading the inhabitants that Greek rule was legitimate, since Bulgaria had taken the city from them, and because the population of the city had initially come from the Greek city of Philippopolis. Moreover, Theodore, the emperor's son, was within his rights to hold territories in Bulgaria, as he was the son-in-law of the former tsar, John Asan II. Manglavites showed that allegiance to the emperor was preferable to the rule of yet another underage tsar. The rightful ruler of the city, Nicholas Litovoes, was ill and had lost control of the situation. Thus, the city of Melnik willingly accepted Nicaean rule (it would have otherwise been very difficult to conquer, because of its position). Soon after that, Stenimachos and Tzepaina were conquered. The Nicaean expansion then continued westwards with the occupation of the strongholds in the valley of the Vardar River: Stoumpion (Stob), Chotovos (Hotovo), Prosakos and Veles, as well as the cities of Velbužd, Skopion and Prilep. All that John Asan II had conquered in 1230 was now lost to the Nicaeans, who became the hegemonic power in the Balkans, for they gained control over the main roads—*Via Egnatia*, as well as the Vardar valley. The remaining southern parts of the Second Bulgarian Empire were now under Theodore Angelos Comnenos Doukas, who resided in Vodena, and his nephew Michael II Doukas (the latter had conquered Ohrid at some point before 1246, probably immediately after John Asan II's death). In the spring of 1247, a peace treaty was concluded, acknowledging all those

45 Akropolites, c. 43 (ed. Heisenberg, 73–75; transl. Macrides, 225–227); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 491–494; FGHB VIII, 278–280); Jireček 1876, 264; Miller 1923, 492; Zlatarski 1972, III, 430–432; Nicol 1957, 145; Nicol 1966, 316–317; Dujčev 1968, 38; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 65; Gjuzelev 1977b, 152; Petkova 1980, 108–109; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 157; Božilov 1985, 106; Soustal 1991, 108; Fine 1994, 156; Bredenkamp 1996, 267–268; Stavridou-Zafraka 2007, 122; Kanellopoulos, Lekeas 2007, 61.



MAP 8 *The Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 1246.*

territorial losses. It also maintained the obligation of the common fight against the Latin Empire (the truce with the Latins had expired in 1243).<sup>46</sup>

War with the Latins began in fact in August 1247. In cooperation with the Bulgarians and the Cumans, John III Vatatzes took Midia, Derkos (now Durusu) and Vizye, all in the environs of Constantinople. The region in which the military operations took place was on the southwestern Black Sea shore, and presumably the Bulgarian army advanced along the coast, from Mesembria to Anchialos, Sozopolis, and Agathopolis, all ports that continued to be held by Bulgaria.<sup>47</sup>

Even before the new coalition of Orthodox forces against the Latin Empire, Hungary had taken advantage of Kaliman's death and the rise to power of an anti-Catholic group. The charter that King Béla IV gave to the Hospitallers on June 2, 1247 (confirmed by the pope in 1250) mentions the likelihood of

46 Akropolites, c. 44, 46 (ed. Heisenberg, 75–79, 84; transl. Macrides, 230–232, 242); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 494–495; FGHB VIII, 280–281); *Regesten*, III, 20 (nr. 1787); Zlatarski 1972, III, 433–436; Nicol 1957, 146–148; Cončev 1959, 286; Gjuzelev 1975, 47; Asdracha 1976, 54; Gjuzelev 1977b, 152; Koledarov 1979, 69; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 157; Božilov 1985, 106; Kravari 1989, 43, 103, 149, 171, 319; Soustal 1991, 460, 488; Fine 1994, 157; Mladjov 2010, 139–140; Angelov 2011, 116; Angelov 2013, 283.

47 Akropolites, c. 47 (ed. Heisenberg, 85; transl. Macrides, 245); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 498; FGHB VIII, 283); Polemis 1966; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 65–68, 75; Gjuzelev 1975, 47; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 158–159; Božilov 1985, 106; Gagova 1986b, 200–201; Soustal 1991, 108; Fine 1994, 157; Dimitrov 1997, 22; Petkov 2008, 440; Külzer 2008, 200; Külzer 2011, 203, 290, 330, 520; Angelov 2013, 283; Uzelac 2015b, 66.

a Hungarian operation against Bulgaria, Greece and Cumania, for which the Knights had to provide assistance in the form of a third of their forces (they were to keep the rest for their other missions—the defense of the Banat of Severin and the recovery of Cumania, which had been conquered by the Mongols).<sup>48</sup> This suggests that the Hungarian king was planning an attack on Bulgaria before Bulgaria and the Bulgarian-Nicaean alliance came into being. Pope Innocent IV had also taken note of Hungary's new, hostile policy towards Bulgaria, which transpires from Béla IV letter of November 11, 1247 to the pope. The letter mentions Bulgaria and Cumania as countries that had to be taken back from the Mongols.<sup>49</sup> The assumption that in 1247 the Belgrade-Braničevo region was regained<sup>50</sup> is groundless, for it is based on a wrong interpretation of the sources.<sup>51</sup> It is, however, possible that Hungary attacked Bulgaria sometime in 1247, because the state of war is clearly mentioned in Béla's letter of November 11, 1247 document ("Bulgarorum et Boznensium hereticorum a parte meridiei, contra quos etiam ad presens per nostrum exercitum dimicamur").<sup>52</sup>

When he turned 14 or 15, Michael Asan decided to attack Serbia, at that time under Stephen Uroš I (1243–1276). The tsar's young age should not surprise in this context. Henry II of England led his first military operation at age 14 (1147). At any rate, Michael Asan first secured an alliance with Ragusa (Dubrovnik), the city with which John Asan II had established privileged relations in 1230 or 1231. In the name of his city, Marsilio Giorgi promised to provide assistance in a common action against the Serbian king, and claimed a portion of his state, should the war be victorious. This is mentioned in a charter of June 15, 1253 written in Thessaloniki in Slavonic. A third ruler joined the coalition against Stephen Uroš I, his rival Serbian ruler Radoslav of Hum. A charter issued by the Serbian king shows that Bulgarian and Cuman troops reached the city of Bjelopolje in Montenegro, but then there was a sudden retreat. Some have interpreted this to have been caused by a Hungarian attack.<sup>53</sup> Bulgaria's expedition against Serbia must have given Béla IV the long-awaited opportunity to

48 Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1887, 249–253 (doc. CXCH) = DRH D I, 21–28 (no. 10); Holban 1981, 77; Papacostea 1993, 111, 138–140; Turcuș 2001, 239–242; Achim 2008, 132–137.

49 Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1887, 259–262 (doc. CXCI) = *Acta Innocentii IV*, 191–194 (doc. 112). The letter was wrongly dated to 1250 or 1254 in both collections, and in some studies as well (e.g., Dimitrov 1997, 23–24; Dimitrov 1998, 155). For the correct date, see Sălăgean 2016, 60–61; Achim 2008, 128, 136–137.

50 Petkova 1980, 109–112; Fine 1994, 157.

51 Achim 2008, 137–138.

52 Dimitrov 1997, 23; Dimitrov 1998, 155.

53 Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1890, 787–793 (doc. DCXLI) = Petkov 2008, 231–235; Jireček 1876, 264–265; Jireček 1911, 311, 313, 314; Miller 1923, 524; Zlatarski 1972, 111, 438–445; Petkova

intervene against the young tsar and to settle an older territorial dispute. It was only at this point, during the first months of 1254, that the King of Hungary occupied the Belgrade-Braničevo region and gave it to his son-in-law, the Duke of Mačva Rostislav Mihailovič (a Rus' prince who had taken refuge in Hungary because of the Mongols).<sup>54</sup>

After Emperor John III Vatatzes's death on November 4, 1254, Michael Asan took advantage of the small number of Byzantine forces remaining in the western part of the Empire to reclaim the territories lost a few years earlier. In late 1254, his army crossed the Maritsa river and conquered the theme of Achridos in the central area of the Rhodopi Mountains. This territory was in the valley of the Arda River, and included the strongholds of Stenimachos, Peristitza (now Peruštica), Kritzimos, and Tzepaina. Michael Asan also took Skopion and a number of strongholds in the environs of Adrianople. He could now boast of ruling over a territory almost as large as that held by his father, John Asan II (see Map 9). The reconquest of Kritzimos was recorded in an inscription. As the population in those regions was mainly Bulgarian, locals welcomed Michael Asan as a liberator. George Akropolites insists upon their hatred of *Romaioi* (Greeks), against whom they had rebelled before. One can assume that, for additional protection, Michael Asan made peace with Hungary. It was a wise action, which took account of Bulgaria's yet fragile situation in an area still controlled, albeit from the distance, by the Golden Horde. To seal the peace with Hungary, the tsar married Anna, the daughter of Rostislav Mihailovič.<sup>55</sup>

Until recently, scholars believed that tsar Michael and his wife Anna were depicted in the exterior fresco in the church dedicated to Archangel Michael from Kastoria (the woman had previously been identified with his mother,

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- 1980, 113–114; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 160; Božilov 1985, 107; Fine 1994, 200–201; Dimitrov 1997, 24–25; Dimitrov 1998, 156; Achim 2008, 138–139; Angelov 2013, 283; Uzelac 2015a, 96.
- 54 Zlatarski 1972, III, 456–458; Hóman 1943, 164–165; Petkova 1980, 113–115; Holban 1981, 86; Fine 1994, 159; Dimitrov 1997, 25–26; Dimitrov 1998, 156–157; Achim 2008, 139–144; Ninov 2015, 126. Mačva is the region between the Sava and the Drina, south of Belgrade.
- 55 Akropolites, c. 54 (ed. Heisenberg, 107–109; transl. Macrides, 281); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 512–514; FGHb VIII, 286–287); Nikephor Gregoras, III, 1 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 90; FGHb XI, 128); Jireček 1876, 266; Pappadopoulos 1908, 69–70; Miller 1923, 501; Zlatarski 1972, III, 447–449; Cončev 1959, 287; Asdracha 1976, 36, 64, 167; Gjuzelev 1977b, 152–153; Petkova 1980, 114; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 161; Božilov 1985, 107; Dančeva-Vasileva 1986, 104; Gagova 1986b, 201; Kravari 1989, 45, 161; Soustal 1991, 108, 161, 325, 393, 460, 488; Fine 1994, 159; Kanellopoulos, Lekea 2007, 57; Achim 2008, 140; Ducellier 2008, 794. For the inscription see Malingoudis 1979, 73 și Petkov 2008, 427.





MAP 9 *The Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 1254.*

Irina).<sup>56</sup> However, Ian Mladjov has effectively demonstrated on the basis of historical and iconographic arguments that the person in the fresco is another Michael, the son of tsar John Asan III (1270–1280), who held properties in Macedonia.<sup>57</sup> Under Michael Asan, new imperial churches and, especially, monasteries (*tsarki manastir*) were built in Batoševo (Gabrovo region) and Vratsa. Votive inscriptions glorify him as “great tsar” (a similar inscription dated in 1252/1253 may be found in the Rožak Cave Monastery, in the Provadija region of present-day Bulgaria).<sup>58</sup>

The new Nicaean emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258) immediately responded to Michael Asan’s attack with a counteroffensive, perhaps in January 1255. The Byzantine army advanced from Adrianople along the Maritsa (Hebros) towards the region that had been reclaimed by the Bulgarians. Tsar Michael’s camp, which was nearby, was surrounded, and his remaining forces fled into the woods. Theodore II Laskaris’ army was most obviously better equipped and organized after the reforms implemented by John III Vatatzes, who focused on the Cuman and Western mercenaries, as well as on granting *pronoia* domains.<sup>59</sup> William of Rubruck, returned from Tripoli in August 1255, knew that “Vastacius’s son is sickly and is at war with the son of Assan, who is likewise a mere lad and whose power has been eroded by the Tartar yoke” (*Filius Vastacii debilis est, et bellum habet cum filio Assani, qui similiter est*

56 Cankova-Petkova 1969, 69; Georgieva 1995, 175; Georgieva 2010, 116, 120. The woman was identified by Subotić 1998–1999, 93–102.

57 Mladjov 2012, 490–495.

58 Ivanova 1946; Cankova-Petkova 1969, 68–69; Malingoudis 1979, 63–72; Petkov 2008, 426–427.

59 Ostrogorsky 1956, 466; Bartusis 1992, 25–35.

garcio et attritus servitute Tartarorum").<sup>60</sup> Theodore II's army continued its victorious march, occupying Beroe without much resistance. Had it not been for the harsh winter, the offensive would have continued towards Tărnovo. The army returned to Adrianople, with many a large booty and prisoners. After a while, the emperor sent troops to occupy the strongholds in the Achridos area of the Rhodopi Mountains. Faced with attacks by disciplined troops equipped with war machines, the garrisons in those strongholds quickly surrendered. Thus, the Byzantines reclaimed Stenimachos, Kritzimos and Peristitza.<sup>61</sup>

Dragotas's rebellion in Melnik also occurred in the spring of 1255. Unhappy with his reward for switching to the Nicaean side, he gathered a group of warriors and besieged the city's citadel, which was under the control of a Byzantine garrison. The Nicaean emperor marched with his army to Melnik. After passing Serres, he entered the Rupel pass (also known as Kleidion), on the Struma valley, one of those *kleisouras* mentioned in previous chapters. There waited Dragotas, at the head of an army made up of footmen. Having learned from scouts about the Bulgarians in the pass, the emperor sent archers to occupy the surrounding hills, and then the heavy cavalry dealt a frontal blow to the Bulgarian forces in the pass. Turning the difficult terrain to an advantage, Theodore II then advanced towards the citadel (meanwhile occupied by Dragotas's men), which surrendered (Dragotas was wounded and died three days later).<sup>62</sup> The attempt to create a new, independent Bulgarian center of power in Melnik had failed (nothing is known about Dragotas receiving help from Tsar Michael).

After a victory achieved in the same place in which Basil II had defeated Samuel on July 20, 1014, the Byzantine army returned to Adrianople. Another expedition against Tzepaina was not as successful. However, taking advantage of the fact that Byzantine army had moved to Asia Minor for the winter, Michael Asan attacked Macedonia in the spring of 1256 with an army of 4,000 Cumans.

60 William of Rubruck, *Epilogus* (ed. Michel-Wright, 394–395; transl. Jackson, 277); Sacerdoțeanu 1930, 94. This fragment is missing in Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887 and FLHB IV.

61 Akropolites, c. 56–57 (ed. Heisenberg, 111–114; transl. Macrides, 281–287); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 514–515; FGHB VIII, 287–288); Pappadopoulos 1908, 70–73; Miller 1923, 502; Zlatarski 1972, III, 450–451; Nicol 1957, 158; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 161–162; Kravari 1989, 45; Soustal 1991, 108, 164, 204, 325, 393, 460; Kanellopoulos, Lekea 2007, 57–58; Külzer 2008, 145; Angelov 2013, 284–286.

62 Akropolites, c. 58 (ed. Heisenberg, 116; transl. Macrides, 288–289); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 516–517; FGHB VIII, 288–289); Pappadopoulos 1908, 74–75; Miller 1923, 502; Zlatarski 1972, III, 452–453; Dujčev 1968, 38–40; Popović 2007; Kanellopoulos, Lekea 2007, 58, 66–69; Mladjov 2010, 140; Angelov 2013, 286.

They ravaged the area between Didymoteichon and Bulgarophygon (Babaeski), in the environs of Constantinople. Back in Thrace, the Byzantine army counterattacked in a battle near Vyzie, and the Cuman troops surrendered, as they were outnumbered. Through his father-in-law, Rostislav Mihailovič, Michael Asan sued for peace. That was granted to him at a high cost: the peace concluded in the camp of the Byzantine army on the Regina (Ergene) river bank in June 1256 gave Tzepaina to Theodore II Laskaris, even though the Nicaeans had not been able to conquer it. Besides George Akropolites, the details of the peace treaty are known from the emperor's letter announcing the recuperation, without any battle, of strong fort of Tzepaina. The emperor's letter describes the Bulgarian-Nicaean frontier as leaving Philippopolis and Sofia to Bulgaria, while the Vardar valley with the cities of Velbužd, Vrania and Skopion was now under Nicaean control. In reality, however, the region between Velbužd and Skopion was not occupied by the Nicaeans, but remained under Bulgarian authority until Serbia conquered it in 1282. That much results from the charter that Constantine Asan gave at an unknown date to the monastery of St. George in Vergino Brdo, which was located in Skopion (Skopje).<sup>63</sup>

The defeat and the humiliating peace of June 1256 caused a violent reaction of those boyars who did not want good relation with the Byzantines, but favored Hungary instead. Sometimes in early 1257, Michael Asan died at the hands of conspirators led by his cousin, Kaliman (he was probably the son of *sevastokrator* Alexander). Like Boril before him, Kaliman II married the widow of the previous tsar. Rostislav Mihailovič immediately organized an expedition to Tărnovo in his support, but before his troops got there, Kaliman II was also assassinated (the empress then returned to Mačva with her father). With the death of Kaliman II, the Asanid dynasty was extinguished on the male line. Nevertheless, it continued with a woman, namely with the empress of the man the boyars elected to replace Kaliman II. Constantine, son of Tich, was a Serbian aristocrat from Skopion, a descendent of the Serbian king Stephen

63 Theodor Laskaris, 279–282; Akropolites, c. 59–62 (ed. Heisenberg, 117–127; transl. Macrides, 292–305); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 518–526; FGHV VIII, 290–295); Nikephor Gregoras, III, 1 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 91; FGHV XI, 129); *Regesten*, III, 26–27 (nr. 1833); Jireček 1876, 266; Pappadopoulos 1908, 75–78, 90–92; Miller 1923, 502, 525; Zlatarski 1972, III, 453–461; Cončev 1959, 287–289; Asdracha 1976, 171–172; Koledarov 1979, 70–72; Petkova 1983, 60–61; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 162–163; Kravari 1989, 45, 47; Soustal 1991, 108, 223, 241, 425; Fine 1994, 159; Dimitrov 1998, 158; Kanellopoulos, Lekea 2007, 59–60; Achim 2008, 145–146; Külzer 2008, 290, 614; Dančeva-Vasileva 2008, 12; Mladjov 2010, 140–147; Külzer 2011, 203; Angelov 2013, 286–288.

Nemanja (the name of Tich is an abbreviation of Tichomir, his older brother).<sup>64</sup> After being compelled to abandon his first wife, Constantine married in 1258 Irene, the daughter of Theodore II Laskaris and of Mary, the daughter of John Asan II. He therefore entered the Asanid family as John Asan II's nephew by marriage, receiving the name of Constantine Asan. The new tsar was an ally of the Emperor of Nicaea, his father-in-law. Thus, the pro-Byzantine faction returned to power.<sup>65</sup> Historians have noted the significance of the events of 1257: after that, and until its disappearance in 1393, succession to power in the Second Bulgarian Empire was a matter of election by various groups of boyars, and not of dynastic legitimacy.<sup>66</sup>

Tsar Constantine Asan and Tsarina Irina are depicted in a 1259 mural painting inside the Boyana church near Sofia.<sup>67</sup> A 1263/1264 inscription in the church of Troitsa (located between Preslav and Šumen) calls him tsar and *samodăržets* (autocrat) of all the Bulgarians. The same title also appears in the donation charter for the St. George monastery of Vergino Brdo.<sup>68</sup> Three gold seals and one lead seal are known from Constantine Asan, all with the same legend mentioning that he was Bulgarian tsar and *samodăržets*. The emperor is represented with a diadem on his head, holding a scepter in his right and a scroll in his left hand. The Archangel Michael appears on the other side of the seal. The iconography is similar to that on billon coins struck for Constantine Asan, but there are also coins showing the tsar on horseback or on the throne.<sup>69</sup>

64 For his origin, see the most recent contributions, Pirivatrić 2009 and Pirivatrić 2011, 13–16. It seems that he was a kinsman of a local ruler from Skopion, Iovan Tichomir, attested in 1220.

65 Akropolites, c. 73 (ed. Heisenberg, 152–153; transl. Macrides, 334); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 533; FGHB VIII, 298); Pachymeres, I. 13; v. 3 (ed. Failler, I, 58/59; II, 440/441; FGHB X, 149, 163); Nikephor Gregoras, III, 2, 3 (transl. Van Diäten, I, 93, 94; FGHB XI, 130, 131); *Regesten*, III, 28 (nr. 1843); Jireček 1876, 267, 269–270; Pappadopoulos 1908, 124–125; Jireček 1911, 316–317; Miller 1923, 525; Zlatarski 1972, III, 466–470, 474–477; Margos 1965, 295–299; Petkova 1983, 61–62; Božilov 1985, 113–115; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 164; Dančeva-Vasileva 1986, 104; Georgieva 1993, 119; Fine 1994, 170–173; Georgieva 1995, 176–177; Achim 2008, 146; Petkov 2008, 441; Georgieva 2010, 121; Angelov 2011, 105; Georgieva 2012, 442–443; Matanov 2011, 10–11.

66 Ransohoff 2014, 262–264.

67 Zlatarski 1972, III, 480; Georgieva 1995, 179; Atanasov 1999, 152–156; Schroeder 2010, 109–111; Georgieva 2010, 124; Matanov 2011, 11–12; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 29–30.

68 Zlatarski 1972, III, 478; Petkov 2008, 427, 494.

69 Gerasimov 1960, 65–68; HENDY 1969, 645–647; Atanasov 1999, 156; Jordanov 2001a, 117–118; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 46.

Michael's murder was followed by several separatist actions which revealed the fragility of the state. Ever since Michael Asan's reign, an autonomous territory within Bulgaria was led by *sevastokrator* Peter. The alliance treaty concluded with Ragusa in 1253 shows that he was the ruler of a *zemlja* ("country") inside the empire. Michael is named "tsar of the entire country of Bulgaria," but both "men and merchants from the holy tsardom and from *sevastokrator* Peter's country" were promised protection if going to Ragusa. Another passage of the treaty suggests that Peter's *zemlja* was almost a separate state:

if the people of your holy tsardom or of Peter, the high *sevastokrator*, have any claims against a man from the principdom of Dubrovnik, we take the obligation to offer him due process and complete justice for free and without fees, according to our laws. Also let our people in the land of your holy tsardom and that of *sevastokrator* Peter have full justice [according to the laws] of your holy stardom and those of the high *sevastokrator* Peter, without any fees and without court expenses. No deals should be made between your holy tsardom and us until justice is done.<sup>70</sup>

Peter seem to have had his own laws, separate from those of the empire. He was not mentioned in the treaty in relation with the tsar's expected military action against Serbia, which could only mean that Peter could not have an independent foreign policy. His was an autonomous, not independent territory, perhaps similar to the appanages of Western feudalism. Tudor Teoteoi in fact believed that, like Slav and Strez, Peter ruled over a kind of appanage, "a feature which makes the Second Bulgarian Empire more similar to Western feudalism than to the Byzantine state, where such arrangements become the rule only during the reign of the Palaeologans, but even then under certain specific circumstances."<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, nothing is known about the whereabouts of Peter's *zemlja*. Georgi Nikolov believes that it was located in northeastern Bulgaria, because that is where the grain production was concentrated, which attracted the interest of the Ragusan merchants. Peter was the tsar's brother-in-law, and it is possible that his *zemlja* was the land he had acquired as the dowry of his wife.<sup>72</sup> Peter is not mentioned in any other sources, so nothing is known about his *zemlja* in the years following Michael's death. Another appanage was held by

70 Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1890, 787–793 (doc. DCXLII) = Petkov 2008, 231–233; Zlatarski 1972, III, 430–431; Biliarsky 1999, 182.

71 Teoteoi 1989, 87.

72 Nikolov 2007, 263.

*sevastokrator* Kaloian, a cousin of Tsar Constantine Asan. It seems that he was the son of Stephen Vladislav and Beloslava, but there are also other possibilities to explain his family connections. Kaloian is only known from an inscription and votive painting in the Boyana church (erected in 1258–1259), which was within his appanage.<sup>73</sup>

In 1261, another one of Theodore II Laskaris' daughters, whose name is unknown, was given in marriage to "a Bulgarian named Svetoslav, the ruler of the mountain region of Haemus in Mysia." The man to whom Pachymeres referred in that passage was Jacob Svetoslav, a Rus' refugee who had come to Bulgaria sometime during John Asan II's reign. Upon his marriage, Emperor Michael VIII granted him the title of despot, as indicated in a letter he wrote to the metropolitan of Kiev in 1262, as well as in the diptych of Boyana. Ivan Biliarsky has demonstrated that, as with Alexios Slav, the title of despot could only be granted by the Byzantine emperor, even if it was also recognized in Bulgaria. Through his marriage, Jacob Svetoslav became Constantine Asan's brother-in-law. Historians believe that the mountain region under his rule must have been somewhere in the west, along the Morava and close to the Serbian border. After 1263, Svetoslav's lands were included into the Vidin region, under circumstances to which I return later.<sup>74</sup> Vidin was at that time in the hands of Rostislav Mihailovič, who, after leaving Tărnovo, took advantage of the anarchy in Bulgaria to resume conquest in that area on behalf of the Hungarian king. He remained duke of Mačva until his death in 1262, or possibly in 1264 (according to the latest research).<sup>75</sup>

Mičo,<sup>76</sup> a Bulgarian boyar who had married Maria, the daughter of John Asan II and of Irene, also claimed power after Michael's death. Like Peter, he received an appanage from his father-in-law, John Asan II. Mičo ruled in Preslav, where he struck his own coins, on which he is depicted with a diadem and a

73 Zlatarski 1972, III, 479–480; Savčeva 1979, 58, 69–70; Teoteoi 1989, 87; Petkov 2008, 442; Dančeva-Vasileva 2008, 13–16; Dimitrov B. 2008, 4–5; Schroeder 2010, 103–104, 108–109; Pirivatrić 2011, 18–30.

74 Pachymeres, III. 6 (ed. Failler, I, 242/243; FGHB X, 152); Jireček 1876, 275; Zlatarski 1972, III, 499–502, 542; Petkova 1978, 76; Koledarov 1979, 75, 77 and the map at 64–65; Savčeva 1979, 60; Failler 1980, 72–73; Petkova 1983, 62; Fine 1994, 175; Georgieva 1995, 194–197; Biliarsky 1995, 133–134, 147–148; Achim 2008, 164–165; Petkov 2008, 442–443; Biliarsky 2011, 282; Georgieva 2012, 444–445.

75 Darkó 1933, 27; Fine 1994, 171–172; Dimitrov 1998, 162; Achim 2008, 143–145; Hardi 2012.

76 The name, also mentioned as *Mitzes* in Greek, was a diminutive of *Mihail*, or of *Simeon*. See Stankov 2015, 365.

scepter.<sup>77</sup> Some historians believe that his appanage also included Mesembria,<sup>78</sup> but according to George Pachymeres, Mičo first went to Mesembria as a refugee during his conflict with Constantine Asan. Nikephoros Gregoras knew that Mičo had been banished from Tărnovo to Mesembria by Constantine, and the fact seems to be confirmed by coin finds (supposedly, Mičo coins struck coins in Mesembria in 1256–1257, and also in Preslav in 1257–1263). Mičo's seal with the title of tsar and showing him horseback has been discovered in Mogila, between Šumen and Provadija.<sup>79</sup> The seal thus confirms that Mičo ruled over a territory in northeastern Bulgaria centered upon Preslav. Claims to the contrary, namely that he ruled somewhere in northwestern Bulgaria, next to the border with Hungary, will have to be abandoned.<sup>80</sup>

Constantine Asan had to deal with a number of problems, from Mičo's domestic opposition to Rostislav Mihailovič's intrusion into the northwestern region on behalf of the Hungarian king. Moreover, Mesembria was attacked in June (or July) 1257, apparently at Emperor Baldwin II's request, by a Venetian fleet commanded by Admiral Giacomo Dauro. The Venetians managed to steal a precious relic—the head of Saint Theodore Stratilates, who had been the patron saint of Venice, before Saint Mark. The city, however, remained under Bulgarian rule. The information comes from the account of a Venetian monk, who nonetheless made the Vlachs, not the Bulgarians the enemies of the Latin Empire (*contra gentem Blachorum*, or *gente di Vallachi* in a 16th-century Italian translation). This is the last piece of evidence pertaining to the Vlachs in the Second Bulgarian Empire, but Romanian historians largely ignored the account. Ever since the Fourth Crusade, the Venetians knew that the Vlachs had been a major component in the Bulgarian empire's army. As expected, Bulgarian historians disagree: Vasil Gjuzev believes that *Blachi* (*Vallachi*) in the Venetian account of the 1257 expedition against Mesembria are Bulgarians, not Vlachs. The naval expedition is also mentioned by Andrea Dandolo and Lorenzo de Monacis. The latter indicates that the Venetian fleet had ten galleys, but does not mention the name of the enemy.<sup>81</sup> Be as it may, the Mesembria was not wrested from

77 Pachymeres, v. 5 (ed. Failler, II, 448/449–450/451; FGHB X, 166); Nikephor Gregoras, III, 2 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 93; FGHB XI, 130); Miller 1923, 525; Zlatarski 1972, III, 471–474; Hendy 1969, 644; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 164–166; Fine 1994, 172–173; Atanasov 1999, 158; Sotirov 2004; Nikolov 2007, 263; Angelov 2011, 105; Mitev 2011; Mladjov 2012, 486–489 (who believes that the wife could be the other daughter, Anna Theodora); Matanov 2011, 12–13.

78 Gjuzev 1975, 48–49; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 165; Nikolov 2007, 263–264.

79 Jordanov 2001a, 113; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2011, 47.

80 Dimitrov 1998, 163–165; Achim 2008, 147.

81 *Translatio*, 263–265; Dandolo, 308; Lorenzo de Monacis, 51; Jireček 1876, 267 (wrongly dated in 1256, during the Bulgarian-Nicaean war); Gjuzev 1975, 38–44; Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 165; Soustal 1991, 108, 356; Fine 1994, 171; Nikolov 2007, 264.

Bulgarian hands in 1257, and the Venetians did not surrender the city to Mičo, as Viorel Achim wrongly claims.<sup>82</sup> Baldwin II clearly tried to take advantage of the change of rule in Târnovo, but the Venetian attack of Mesembria was also playing in the favor of Rostislav Mihailovič, who had occupied the north-western parts of Bulgaria on behalf of the Hungarian king. Given that Bulgaria was allied with the Byzantines, a Latin-Hungarian alliance was only natural.<sup>83</sup> Rostislav Mihailovič may have even been perceived in Constantinople as an independent ruler. He attacked Constantine Asan in 1259, but this time with the assistance of a large Hungarian army. A 1260 document records the battles of a certain nobleman named Torda against the Bulgarian army.<sup>84</sup>

In retaliation, Constantine Asan and Jacob Svetoslav attacked Rostislav's duchy when he was involved in Bela IV's failed campaign in Bohemia in the spring and summer of 1260. That much results from a charter on behalf of Master (Magister) Lawrence (Laurentius), who was appointed Ban of Severin in April 1264. Unlike other Hungarian noblemen, who hesitate to fight, Lawrence managed to repel the Bulgarian attack and to restore the authority of the king over the Banat of Severin ("Banatum de Zeurino hostiliter deuastassent . . . Banatum ad pristinum bonum statum, virtute maxima restauratum, nostrae restituit maiestati"). The Bulgarian attack must have taken place during the war with the King of Bohemia, Ottokar II.<sup>85</sup> Constantine Asan acted as Mongol subject. In 1259, after the Golden Horde strengthened its domination, the Mongols attacked Poland and Lithuania, and invited Béla IV to join them with a part of his own army. As Béla refused, he was attacked instead.<sup>86</sup> The hoard from Balș, hidden at some point after 1254 (as mentioned in the previous chapter) is probably to be associated with the military conflict in the Banat of Severin, or with the 1260 attack of the Mongols.<sup>87</sup>

King Béla IV's retaliatory expedition took place in the spring and summer of 1261. The king has his son and heir, Stephen V, on his side. The Duchy of Mačva and Vidin were once again occupied. A later charter dated to 1286 recalls the battles fought at Lom on the Iskăr River. It appears that the Hungarian army moved along the Danube River towards its confluence with the Yantra,

82 Achim 2008, 148.

83 Gjuzelev 1975, 49; Fine 1994, 171; Nikolov 2007, 263–264 (who believes that the attack was against Mičo, already a master of Mesembria).

84 Darkó 1933, 12; Zlatarski 1972, III, 489–492; Petkova 1978, 77; Dimitrov 1998, 166; Achim 2008, 148; Ninov 2015, 131.

85 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 317 (doc. CCXXVIII); Jireček 1876, 271; Darkó 1933, 17; Zlatarski 1972, III, 492, 498; Petkova 1978, 77; Iosipescu 1980, 47; Holban 1981, 85–86, 88; Fine 1994, 173–174; Dimitrov 1998, 169–170; Achim 2008, 144, 149.

86 Papacostea 1993, 116–118; Sălăgean 2016, 70–71.

87 The second possibility was advanced by Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 73.



from which point it turned to the south in the direction of Tărnovo. However, the Hungarians were not able to dislodge Constantine Asan from Tărnovo. Rostislav remained Duke of Mačva, which now included a part of north-western Bulgaria. At his death, Jacob Svetoslav occupied that part.<sup>88</sup>

At the beginning of his reign, Constantine Asan maintained peaceful relations with the Nicaeans. In December 1260, Emperor Michael VIII Paleologos (who ruled in Nicaea as regent of John IV Laskaris, who was a minor) sent an envoy to Tărnovo in the person of the historian George Akropolites. The results of the meeting are not known, for Akropolites did not write about the nature or consequences of his embassy.<sup>89</sup> He probably sought the goodwill of the emperor's brother-in-law (the tsarina was John IV Laskaris's older sister), to ensure security on all borders. It is also possible that Michael VIII was trying to support his new ally, the Hungarian King Béla IV. At that moment, Constantine Asan had taken back the territory conquered by Rostislav, and the Hungarian counteroffensive had not taken place yet.

The alliance between the Empire of Nicaea and Hungary had been in force for about two years. As it was an alliance between an Orthodox emperor and a Catholic king, it demonstrated the ability of both to engage in realistic politics. After all, supporting the Latin Empire made no sense any longer, as the Empire of Nicaea had become the hegemonic power in the region. Béla IV gambled on Michael VIII's victory, and won. He offered his support to Michael VIII in his war with the prince of Epirus, Michael II Doukas. Hungarian troops sent by Béla IV and Rostislav Mihailovič participated in 1259 in the battle of Pelagonia-Bitolia on Michael's side. However, after relations between Constantine Asan and Michael VIII deteriorated, the alliance took a new, clearly anti-Bulgarian dimension. The Bulgarian-Byzantine relations deteriorated because of the tsarina's hostile attitude towards Michael VIII, who had removed her brother, John IV, from power. She must have influenced in that respect Constantine, whose legitimacy as tsar was solely based on him being her husband (Irene played

88 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 298–299 (doc. CCXVII): *in Bulgaria praetacta in nostro conflictu*; Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 310–311 (doc. CCXXIV): *quando habuimus pugnam, in Regno Bulgariae, subcus ciuitatem Budun, nuncupatam*; Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 462 (doc. CCCLXXII): *conflictu Bulgarorum tunc agentis, ultra castrum Lom vocatum, iuxta fluvium Izker*; Wenzel, *Codex*, IX (1871), 71 (no. 40), 197 (no. 136); Jireček 1876, 271; Jireček 1911, 320; Darkó 1933, 21–22, 26; Zlatarski 1972, III, 498–499; Petkova 1978, 77; Holban 1981, 88; Dimitrov 1998, 171–172; Fine 1994, 174; Achim 2008, 149; Ninov 2015, 131–132.

89 Akropolites, c. 84 (ed. Heisenberg, 176; transl. Macrides, 12, 369); Skutariotes (ed. Sathas, 547–548; FGHB VIII, 302–303); *Regesten*, III, 36 (nr. 1888); Jireček 1876, 271; Miller 1923, 525–526; Zlatarski 1972, III, 494; Geanakoplos 1959, 81; Nicol 1966, 326; Fine 1994, 173; Georgieva 2010, 122.

an important part in the state's foreign policy). Shortly before the Byzantine forces reoccupied Constantinople (July 25, 1261), Michael VIII sent troops to Thrace under the command of Alexios Strategopoulos, in order to prevent a possible attack from Constantine Asan. That may have been coordinated with the Hungarian expedition to northern Bulgaria.<sup>90</sup>

Since the second half of 1261, Constantine Asan was therefore faced with Mičo's domestic opposition, as well as two powerful external enemies, one in the south (the restored and revived Byzantine Empire), the other to the north (Hungary). He could rely on Serbian support, especially since he was of Serbian origin. However, nothing is known about a possible cooperation with King Stephen Uroš I after 1261. But Constantine Asan could at least count on his ally, Jacob Svetoslav. With limited resources, Constantine Asan managed not only to remain in power, but also to conduct attacks on Thrace, when a part of the Byzantine army was engaged in the battles for occupying Peloponnesus and Epirus. It has even been said that, the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople stimulated Constantine Asan's hostility towards them. A Serb by birth, he may have wanted to appear more Bulgarian than the Bulgarians.<sup>91</sup> According to Pachymeres, he was able to take back Philippopolis and Stenimachos. To punish the Bulgarian incursions of 1262–1263, Michael VIII went to war in 1263, and took back both Philippopolis and Stenimachos, in addition to the whole of eastern Thrace with the ports of Agathopolis, Sozopolis, and Anchialos. The exterior Zygos (the Strandža range of mountains) became the new border between the two states.<sup>92</sup> Another important loss to the Bulgarians was Mesembria, largely because of Mičo's betrayal. He had taken refuge there, and in order to escape, he asked the emperor to grant him asylum in the empire, in return for giving him Mesembria on a plate. The emperor accepted, and the army operating in Thrace under the command of Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotes occupied the city. Mičo was given an estate near the Skamandros (Karamenderes) river,

90 Pachymeres, II, 26 (ed. Failler, I, 190/191; FGHB X, 151–152); Nikephor Gregoras, IV, 5 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 113; FGHB XI, 134; FHDR III, 502/503); Darkó 1933, 10–13, 21; Zlatarski 1972, III, 495–496; Geanakoplos 1959, 93; Petkova 1978, 77 (Constantine Asan's attack against Hungary is placed chronologically after the mission of Akropolites); Dančeva-Vasileva 1985, 168; Bartusis 1992, 37; Fine 1994, 175; Georgieva 1995, 178; Dimitrov 1998, 167–168, 171; Achim 2008, 149–153; Külzer 2008, 146; Georgieva 2010, 122–124.

91 Miller 1923, 526.

92 Pachymeres, III, 7, 18 (ed. Failler, I, 246/247, 278/279; FGHB X, 153, 154); Manuel Philes, ed. Miller, 242–247 (v. 41–167) = FGHB X, 140–143; Darkó 1933, 25; Zlatarski 1972, III, 493–495, 503–506; Mutafčiev 1943, 20; Asdracha 1975, 137–142; Asdracha 1976, 159; Failler 1980, 91; Gagova 1986b, 201; Soustal 1991, 109, 169, 176, 455, 460; Bartusis 1992, 53; Fine 1994, 176; Külzer 2008, 147; Georgieva 2010, 123.

where he lived with his family until the end of his life. His son, John, married Irene, Michael VIII's daughter.<sup>93</sup>

In 1263, in a panegyric celebrating Michael VIII's victory over Bulgaria, the rhetor Michael Holobolos wrote that "many Paristriian islands rejoiced because you are their emperor; they gave up on their planned rebellion and realized that they had been subjected and oppressed by rulers without legitimate rights." Since this text's first publication in 1942, historians have interpreted the passage as hinting at the return of Byzantine control over northern Dobrudja, in the aftermath of the occupation of eastern Thrace in 1263. The study of monetary circulation in Dobrudja indicates the presence of a large number of Byzantine coins struck for Michael, in contrast to the comparatively smaller number of Bulgarian coins of Constantine Asan and Mičo, which are otherwise common only in the land to the south from Silistra. Since the Byzantines occupied all port cities on the western Black Sea coast, up to Mesembria, in 1263, the Byzantine fleet could easily occupy positions on the Lower Danube, at Isaccea and elsewhere. The separation of Dobrudja from the authority of the tsar in Târnovo could have taken place, however, only after the death of Michael Asan.<sup>94</sup>

After the campaign in eastern Thrace, Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotes advanced into western Bulgaria, the territory under the rule of Jacob Svetoslav. Although George Akropolites does not mention those events, a poem that Manuel Philes (1275–1345) dedicated to Tarchaneiotes lists the 1263 expedition among his most notable military deeds. While the poem does not describe the development of the military operations, Philes mentions the cities that Tarchaneiotes has conquered—Agathopolis, Sozopolis, Anchialos, Mesembria. One verse refers, however, to Svetoslav as enemy: "Like a burning flame, he descended upon Svestoslav" (Ὡς φλόξ δὲ θερμὸς προσβαλὼν Σφεντισλάβω).<sup>95</sup> Several charters that King Stephen V of Hungary issued in 1266 and 1268 mention a war that he has fought against Michael VIII, or against the Greeks.<sup>96</sup> Another charter, dated in 1270, mentions the help Svetoslav received in his

93 Pachymeres, III. 18; v. 5 (ed. Failler, I, 278/279; II, 450/451; FGHB X, 154, 166–167); Nikephor Gregoras, III. 2 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 93; FGHB XI, 130); *Regesten*, III, 43 (no. 1916a); Pappadopoulos 1908, 125; Miller 1923, 525; Gagova 1986b, 201; Soustal 1991, 109; Fine 1994, 173, 176; Nikolov 2007, 264; Georgieva 2012, 444; Bartusis 2013, 292.

94 Previale 1942, 36–37 (FHDR III, 454/455); Laurent 1945; Brătianu 1945, 199; Iosipescu 1985, 24; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 147–148.

95 Manuel Philes, ed. Miller, 247 (v. 166) = FGHB X, 143; Marinow 2007b, 271–273.

96 CDH, IV/3 (1829), 344, 345: *contra Paleologum imperatorem Graecorum*; Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 339 (doc. CCLI): *exercitum nostrum in Greciam*; Jireček 1876, 271; Dimitrov 1998, 169–170; Achim 2008, pp. 159, 166.

war with Greeks from an army under the command of Nicholas and Ladislaus, the voivodes of Transylvania. The result of that cooperation was the reoccupation of Vidin.<sup>97</sup> The sequence of events may therefore be reconstructed as follows: attacked by the army of Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotēs, Jacob Svetoslav asked the king of Hungary for military assistance, and broke relations with Constantine Asan. Having become a vassal of Stephen V, he participated in the Hungarian expedition of late 1263 into northern Bulgaria, and subsequently became ruler of Vidin, in Rostislav's place.<sup>98</sup> Jacob Svetoslav's betrayal facilitated Hungary's intervention in the region that the Hungarians had invaded in 1182–1183. The Hungarian-Byzantine alliance, which had been formed in 1259, was thus cancelled, as both states wanted to expand into western Bulgaria.<sup>99</sup>

Constantine Asan's retaliation came unexpectedly. In the fall of 1264, the Seljuk Sultan Izz al-Din Kaykaus hatched a plot to instigate the Mongols to attack Thrace, together with Constantine Asan's army. The Byzantine emperor was going to be captured on the road back to Thessaly, and even if the operation failed, the plunder would have been considerable. The sultan, who was being held prisoner in Ainos (now, Enez), requested the help of one of his uncles in the Golden Horde (probably in Crimea). That uncle cannot have been Khan Berke, of whom it was assumed that he was married to one of Izz al-Din Kaykaus' aunts (the information was conveyed by the chronicle of Karim al-din Mahmud Aksarayi, written in 1323, from which it was taken by Yazicioğlu Ali, the author of a Seljuk history written in 1424). Pachymeres' remains the most credible account, and he knew nothing about Izz al-Din Kaykaus and Berke being related. Nor does the Byzantine author give the name of Izz al-Din Kaykaus' uncle, but Arab and Persian sources reveal that he was called Khaya. Khaya contacted the Bulgarian tsar.<sup>100</sup> Both Constantine Asan and Irene gladly accepted the proposal. In the winter of 1264/1265, therefore, 20,000 Tatars crossed the frozen Danube and joined Constantine Asan's forces. In Pachymeres's words, the Mongols swooped "like dogs, to devour prosperous regions." After crossing the Stara Planina, the marauders divided themselves into several units and spread throughout Thrace, to ambush the few Byzantine forces left in the region. The main direction of attack was the valley of the Maritsa, with Ainos (where Izz al-Din Kaykaus was held) being located at

97 CDP, VI (1876), 166–167 (nr. 117): *contra Grecos in auxilium Zuetizlay*; Dimitrov 1998, 170; Achim 2008, 166.

98 Darkó 1933, 27–35; Zlatarski 1972, III, 507–509; Petkova 1978, 78–79; Petkova 1983, 62; Fine 1994, 177; Dimitrov 1998, 170–172; Achim 2008, 166.

99 Brătianu 1980, 71; Achim 2008, 174.

100 Shukurov 2011, 186–190; Shukurov 2014, 41–43.

the mouth of the river. Although wounded, Constantine Asan personally commanded the campaign, being driven by the ambition to capture the emperor. Michael VIII barely escaped by embarking a ship at Ganos (Ganos Dağı, 15 km to the south-west from Rhaïdestos-Tekirdağ). Nikephoros Gregoras mentions that “the Scythians, deployed like a fishing net all over Thrace, rode up to the sandy shores, to ensure that no beast, not animal, not even the emperor himself, escapes them. And all went according to their plans, and only the emperor cheated their hopes, remaining free.” Constantine Asan put Ainos under siege, and the inhabitants of the city surrendered and released Izz al-Din Kaykaus, who left for the Golden Horde. However, Bulgaria did not recover the territory lost in 1263.<sup>101</sup>

The 1265 Mongol attack followed a number of significant changes in the Mongol empire and in international relations. In 1255, Great Khan Möngke (1251–1259) named his nephew, Hülegü, the commander of one fifth of the Mongol army, asking him to conquer Iran and Mesopotamia. The fall of Bagdad on February 10, 1258 put an end to the Abbasid Caliphate. The Mongols took northern part of Mesopotamia and Syria, but failed in the attempt to conquer Egypt, as they were defeated by Mamluks at Ain Jalut in Palestine (September 3, 1260). Hülegü established the Il-khanate (the “subordinate khanate”), which recognized the authority of the Great Khan. His khanate, with the capital at Tabriz, became the main enemy of the Golden Horde. The khan of the Golden Horde, Berke, converted to Islam and attacked the Il-khanate in the winter of 1262–1263 under the pretext of avenging the destruction of the Caliphate. In 1262, he established an alliance with the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, Baybars—a slave born amongst the same Cumans that were now subjects of the Golden Horde (as explained in the previous chapter, Baybars had personal reasons for being an enemy of Bulgaria). Michael VIII decided to join the Muslim coalition against the Il-khanate, thus creating a Cairo—Constantinople—Sarai axis, which ensured free navigation through the Straits from the Black into the Mediterranean Sea, which was crucial for the survival of the Mamluk Sultanate, since many of the slaves sold in Egypt were from the Golden Horde.

101 Pachymeres, III, 25 (ed. Failler, I, 300/301–312/313; FGHB X, 155–161; FHDR III, 444/445); Nikephoros Gregoras, IV, 5–6 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 113–114; FGHB XI, 134–135; FHDR III, 502/503); Jireček 1876, 272; Zlatarski 1972, III, 510–511; Balasceff 1940, 15–18; Ostrogorsky 1956, 483; Geanakoplos 1959, 181–182; Margos 1965, 299; Spuler 1965, 47–48; Asdracha 1976, 41; Decei 1978, 170–172, 182–185; Faillier 1981, 150–155; Gonța 1983, 89–90; Soustal 1991, 109, 170; Bartusis 1992, 53; Papacostea 1993, 120; Fine 1994, 177–178; Vásáry 2005, 72–76; Külzer 2008, 375; Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 89–93, 97; Ciocîltan 2012, 97, 245–249; Shukurov 2014, 44; Uzelac 2015a, 84–88.

The emperor therefore relied on Berke in his war against Bulgaria. However, in 1264 Michael VIII broke the alliance by making a concession for Hülägü: he decided to keep in jail Izz al-Din Kaykaus, who had rebelled against the Il-Khan. The 1265 Mongol attack must therefore be seen as retaliation for Michael VIII's breaking his alliance with Berke and Baybars.<sup>102</sup>

According to a tradition recorded in Yazicioğlu Ali's *Seljuk-name*, the Seljuk Turks, who were under Izz al-Din Kaykaus's rule, were settled in Dobrudja. They had taken refuge in the Byzantine Empire after the Il-khanate had occupied their lands, and in order to find a good use for such warriors, Michael VIII sent them to Dobrudja. The Turks moved under the rule of a dervish named Saru Saltuk (the city of Babadag, the name of which translates as "forefather's mountain," refers to the tomb of the dervish, which was located there). The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, who passed through Babadag in 1330, learned about Saru Saltuk, and the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman visited his grave in 1538. In their new homeland, the Turks fought against enemies of the emperor, namely Bulgaria. The trustworthiness of the account in *Seljuk-name* was substantiated by Paul Wittek and Aurel Decei, who claimed that the Turks in question are the ancestors of the Gagauz people (whose name supposedly derives from Kaykaus).<sup>103</sup> Mihail Guboglu, who translated a part of Yazicioğlu Ali's work, also confirmed the trustworthiness of the source.<sup>104</sup> Only Georgi Atanasov rejected with solid arguments the veracity of the tradition, and proposed instead the theory according to which the Gagauz were descendants of the Cumans who settled in Dobrudja in the 13th century. According to Atanasov, that would be the only way to explain that the Gagauz are Christian.<sup>105</sup> A young Romanian historian treats the settlement of the Turks as part of a broader policy of

102 Balasceff 1940, 9–11; Ostrogorsky 1956, 482–483; Spuler 1965, 38–48; Decei 1978, 182; Gonța 1983, 88–89; Morgan 1986, 156–157; Ciocîltan 1991, 83–84, 88–90, 94–96; Papacostea 1993, 119–120; Iosipescu 2006, 56; Ciocîltan 2012, 56–71, 89–93, 97, 241; Uzelac 2015a, 77–83.

103 Balasceff 1940, 19–20, 27–31; Wittek 1952; Holban 1968, 5, 383; Decei 1978, 169–192; Ghiață 1981, 1871; Iosipescu 1985, 25–26; Norris 1994, 212–215; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 76–78; Iosipescu 2006, 59; Ciocîltan 2012, 242, 268; Iosipescu 2013a, 110; Shukurov 2014, 42–43. Vlachia mentioned in the *Chronicle of Morea*, v. 5732 (ed. Lurier, 237) cannot be Dobrudja, as suggested by Shukurov 2014, 40–44. Instead, that is the territory in Thessaly known as Vlachia since the 11th century. Mutafčiev 1943, 89–128 tried to make the Turks in Dobrudja the descendants of Bulgarians who had presumably adopted the Turkish language for no apparent reason (see Daskalov 2015, 295). On the other hand, Brătianu 1999, 307 raised serious doubts about the settling of those Turks as auxiliaries of the Byzantine Empire.

104 Guboglu 1977, 23–50.

105 Atanasov 2010, 401–439.

recruitment of Turkic-speaking warriors for the Byzantine army.<sup>106</sup> The issue remains open, and the tradition cannot be taken at face value, since Yazicioğlu Ali's account contains untrustworthy, if not outright false information, such as the supposed siege of Constantinople by Khan Berke. While the settlement of a Turkic-speaking group in Dobrudja after 1265 seems certain, its relationship to the later Gagauz is still unclear and not of concern for this book.

Constantine Asan's 1265 victory against the Byzantine army prompted Jacob Svetoslav to switch sides and to abandon Stephen v. He also took advantage of the civil war between Stephen v and his father, Béla iv, which had broken out in 1264. Using Vidin as his base, Svetoslav attacked the Banat of Severin in 1265. The rebellion of the Romanian voivode Litovoi, who ruled in northern Oltenia, took place in the same circumstances, and may have even been coordinated with Jacob Svetoslav's actions.<sup>107</sup>

Stephen v launched an expedition in June 1266, which moved quickly in the direction of Vidin, Lom, Oryakhovo, Plevna, and Tărnovo. Both Svetoslav and Constantine Asan were defeated and the latter's capital was sacked.<sup>108</sup> Chapter 32 of the *Illuminated Chronicle of Vienna* contains an illustration showing the siege of a city assumed to be Tărnovo.<sup>109</sup> The same chronicle contains a passage concerning Stephen v's conquest of Vidin, but the illumination associated with chapter 83 depicts the king's coronation.<sup>110</sup> As a result of the 1266 campaign (which is mentioned in several charters dated between 1268 and 1279), King Stephen v also adopted the title of King of Bulgaria. Jacob Svetoslav was once again a subject of the Hungarian king. In 1271, he was still recognized as *imperator Bulgarorum*. As for Constantine Asan, he took again the imperial title in 1273.<sup>111</sup>

106 Costan 2011–2012, 7–33.

107 Sălăgean 2003, 58, 60.

108 Achim 2008, 167 cites *Chronici Hungarici*, 305 for this expedition, but the passage in question refers to an early 10th-century Magyar raid.

109 Dolmova-Lukanovska 2010, 600.

110 *Chronici Hungarici*, 470.

111 Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 341 (doc. CCLII): *usque ad castrum Turnow Bulgaros, hostes nostros et schismaticos devastare*; 348 (doc. CCLVIII): *Zuetizlaus (. . .) tunc nostre Maiestati oppositus terram nostram de Zeurino miserabiliter devastasset*; 348 (doc. CCLVIII): *castrum Pleun Bulgarorum optinuit expugnando*; 414 (doc. CCCXXXIV): *expeditione predicti gloriosi Regis Stephani patris nostri sub Budum*; Jireček 1876, 275; Zlatarski 1972, III, 512, 518–520; Hóman 1943, 180–181; Djurić 1980, 48; Iosipescu 1980, 47; Holban 1981, 88; Petkova 1978, 79; Petkova 1983, 62–63; Fine 1994, 178–179; Dimitrov 1998, 173–174; Sălăgean 2016, 81, 104–105; Achim 2008, 166–167; Ninov 2015, 125, 129.

Frequently changing allegiances, Jacob Svetoslav managed keep Vidin under his rule. According to Ivan Biliarsky, the despot became basically independent, maneuvering between Bulgaria and Hungary. Jacob Svetoslav sowed the seeds of Vidin's later breakaway from Târnovo. He is called tsar in the diptychs of the Boyana and Poganovo monasteries.<sup>112</sup> A charter dated to December 10, 1270 shows that the title of tsar (*Bulgarorum imperator*) was also recognized to Jacob Svetoslav by the Hungarian King Stephen V. The same title of Jacob Svetoslav appears in the 1271 peace treaty between Stephen V and Ottokar II.<sup>113</sup> The despot of Vidin was therefore a tsar both in Bulgaria and in Hungary. The bronze coins with the inscription *des(pot) Svt*<sup>114</sup> have been attributed to Jacob Svetoslav, but Petre Diaconu has demonstrated that they have in fact been struck around 1299 for Theodore Svetoslav, the despot of Dristra (moreover, no such coins have been discovered in or around Vidin).<sup>115</sup>

Shortly after Stephen V's 1266 expedition that resulted in his defeat, Constantine Asan joined Hungary as participant in a coalition against the Byzantine Empire. After leaving in exile, Emperor Baldwin II was convinced by the King of Sicily, Charles of Anjou (1266–1285) to reclaim his throne. Baldwin II's son was to marry Charles's daughter, with Charles as Baldwin's potential successor. The ambitious king of Sicily (who was the brother of the French king Louis IX) was at that time allied both with Venice and with Hungary. He also had a strong support from the pope. The anti-Byzantine coalition began to take shape in 1269, and eventually Serbia and Bulgaria joined the allies.<sup>116</sup> Constantine Asan's first contact with the coalition was at King Béla IV's court in April 1268.<sup>117</sup> However, he decided to stay on the side of Michael VIII who was desperately trying to dismantle the formidable coalition that had been formed against him. To sweeten the offer, Michael gave Constantine Asan the hand of one of his nieces, Mary, the daughter of Eulogia Paleologina. Irene must have died at some point before that. The tsar was also willing to settle the territorial disputes in Thrace and Macedonia, and the emperor promised that Mary would receive Mesembria and Anchialos as dowry. The marriage was

112 Biliarsky 1995, 134; Petkov 2008, 262.

113 Zlatarski 1972, III, 538–539; Djurić 1980, 48; Georgieva 1995, 197; Achim 2008, 168; Uzelac 2015a, 115. The documents: Hurmuzaki, Densușianu 1887, 348 (doc. CCLVIII); Jireček 1876, 275; Dimitrov 1998, 174–175.

114 Petkova 1983, 64; Dočev 1992, 79–81; Biliarsky 1995, 145, 147; Achim 2008, 168.

115 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 126–127; Diaconu 1995; Atanasov 1999, 204–205.

116 Jireček 1876, 272–273; Ostrogorsky 1956, 479–482; Geanakoplos 1959, 189–200, 216–228; Nicol 1993, 49–53; Fine 1994, 169–170, 184–185; Treadgold 1997, 739–740; Achim 2008, 175–182; Uzelac 2015a, 99–101.

117 Dimitrov 1998, 174; Achim 2008, 168.



concluded in 1269, but Michael VIII did not keep his promise, not even after Mary gave birth to a son, Michael (the birth of an heir had been a condition for the return of the two ports). His own niece, Mary, turned against him and convinced Constantine to join the anti-Byzantine coalition.<sup>118</sup>

The Bulgarian tsar thus opened negotiations with Charles of Anjou. Envoys from Serbia and Bulgaria came to Naples in September 1271. Two knights, Giratio de Nicotera and Ioannes Ispanus, were then sent to the *imperator Bulgarorum* in June 1272. They reached Bulgaria after crossing Serbia. In the spring of 1273, more envoys from the emperor of the Bulgarians and the king of Serbia arrived in Naples. Nothing is known about those negotiations, but it seems clear that both Constantine Asan and his neighbor, Stephen Uroš I, decided to join the coalition. Incidentally, it is also worth noting that Charles of Anjou, who wanted to rebuild the Latin Empire of Constantinople, recognized Constantine Asan's imperial title.<sup>119</sup> The diplomatic contacts between Charles, Bulgaria and Serbia took place after the Hungarian king, albeit still ally of Charles of Anjou, resumed a policy of good relations with the Byzantine Empire. Stephen V's daughter Anna married Andronikos, Michael VIII's son, on November 2, 1272. The Hungarian-Byzantine rapprochement may have been directed against Serbia and Bulgaria. Constantine Asan and Stephen Uroš I, therefore, had serious reasons to go to war against Michael VIII in the company of Charles of Anjou. That war, however, never took place, the only result of the diplomatic efforts to build the coalition being the creation of the kingdom of Albania in 1272.<sup>120</sup>

Contacts with Charles of Anjou and his court are most likely responsible for the inclusion into the second part of the *Armorial Wijnbergen* (1265–1288) of two coats of arms attributed to the kings of *Blaquie* and of *Blage*, respectively. Without pointing to any of the last tsars (Constantine Asan, Ivailo, John Asan III), Dan Cernovodeanu noted that the two coats of arms were unusual, in that they violate the basic heraldic rules. They were in fact simple imitations of the coats of arms of the Hungarian kings Stephen V and Ladislaus IV

118 Pachymeres, v. 3, VI. 1 (ed. Failler, II, 440/441–444/445, 544/545; FGHB X, 163–164, 169); *Regesten*, III, 55 (nos. 1969, 1970); Jireček 1876, 272; Zlatarski 1972, III, 522–523; Hristodulova 1978, 62; Failler 1980, 67–68; Gagova 1986b, 201; Georgieva 1993, 119; Fine 1994, 180; Georgieva 1995, 180–181; Biliarsky 1998, 70; Georgieva 2010, 124; Georgieva 2012, 445–446.

119 Del Giudice 1863, I, 220–222; Jireček 1876, 273; Vasiliev 1958, 595; Zlatarski 1972, III, 524–525; Andreev 1978, 62–67; Djurić 1980, 35; Georgieva 1995, 181–182; Biliarsky 1998, 71; Dimitrov 1998, 196–197; Achim 2008, 172–173, 178; Georgieva 2010, 125.

120 Pachymeres, IV. 29 (ed. Failler, II, 412/413); Ostrogorsky 1956, 481–482; Andreev 1978, 65; Petkova 1983, 64; Fine 1994, 180; Achim 2008, 175, 185–186.

that appear in the same armorial—an escutcheon barry of eight Gules and Argent.<sup>121</sup> The coat of arms with a barry of ten and lion paws was probably of Constantine Asan, a contemporary of Stephen v. The idea that the other coat of arms was Litovoi's cannot be excluded (I have in fact accepted it elsewhere<sup>122</sup>), but I think that a good candidate may also be Jacob Svetoslav, who was also a tsar. That the Second Bulgarian Empire was called *Blaquie* at such a late date is indeed curious, but otherwise consistent with the 1257 attestation (Baldwin II's attack). The extraordinary events surrounding the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins have rendered the name *Blaquie* famous among Westerners. *Doon de Maience*, a French *chanson de geste* of the mid-13th century also mentions a king of Vlachia (*roi de Blasquie*).<sup>123</sup>

Jean Mănescu, on the other hand, believes that the king of Vlachia whose coat of arms appears in the armorial is the same as that mentioned by Philippe Mouskés—a ruler of the lands north of the Danube. The existence of two coats of arms—so Mănescu—is the result of the armorial's use of two different sources. We cannot exclude the continuity between “the 1242 Wallachian kingdom and Lytuon-Litovoi's Voivodate of Oltenia mentioned in the Diploma granted to the Hospitaller Knights, five years later.”<sup>124</sup> But the king of Vlachia mentioned by Philippe Mouskés was the ruler of Bulgaria, not of the lands north of the river Danube. Using a later copy of the armorial, composed in England under Henry VI (1437–1471), Grigore Jitaru noted that the coat of arms with lion paws has a barry of twelve (and not ten). He believed the crossed lion paws symbolize “faith and devotion between two great powers.” In addition to a great number of stripes (12), the use of the most valuable tinctures, or and gules, which were superior to those on the coat of arms of the Hungarian king's coat of arms, indicates that the rulers of those two power had mutually accepted to substitute the weaker elements (as coats of arms with fewer stripes are more valuable). Jitaru drew the conclusion that the coat of arms with lion paws was awarded after an important alliance, namely that between Andrew II and John Asan II.<sup>125</sup> The problem, of course, is that the prototype armorial (Wijnbergen) only lists coats of arms in existence at the time of the compilation. For example, the coat of arms of the Hungarian king in the armorial is that of Stephen v, and not of his grandfather, Andrew II. But Jitaru's point about the lion paws symbolizing an alliance is well taken: this may point to the alliance between Constantine Asan and Charles of Anjou.

121 Cernovodeanu 1979, 214–217, 223–224.

122 Madgearu 2002, 45.

123 *Doon de Maience*, 345 (v. 11472).

124 Mănescu 1983, 188.

125 Jitaru 1992, 28.

Ivan Vojnikov believes that the coats of arms may well be imaginary, and that there is no necessary connection between *Blaquie* (or *Blaq*) and Bulgaria under Constantine Asan. In fact paws of a wolf, and not of a lion, symbolize hatred, specifically of Johannitsa. An English armorial of 1295 (*Lord Marshal's Roll*) copied the coat of arms of the *rey de Blaquie* (no. 23) from the Wijnbergen armorial. However, unlike the latter, the English armorial also has a coat of arms (no. 15) attributed to the king of Bulgaria (*roy de Bugrie*)—a silver, crowned lion rampant. Vojnikov's conclusion is that the English armorial combined information culled from the Wijnbergen armorial with information pertaining to the late 13th century, a period during which the ruler of Bulgaria was Tsar Smilets (1292–1298).<sup>126</sup> In reality, the coat of arms with lion paws may well have been that of Constantine Asan, who, upon coming into contact with a Western ruler, had to create his own coat of arms. In order to do so, he drew inspiration from the heraldic symbols of his contemporary, the Hungarian king Stephen v. The coat of arms without paws may in turn be that of Litovoi.

After joining the alliance led by Charles of Anjou, Constantine Asan attacked Thrace in 1272. However, he withdrew immediately, because Michael VIII had also made an alliance with Nogai, the Mongol commander of an army of 10,000 men (*tümen-noian*). Nogai was a descendant of Jöchi, held power over the western parts of the Golden Horde between 1258 and 1299, a greater power than his title entitled him to. Although not officially a khan, he was certainly a great ruler. In 1273, he married Euphrosyna, an illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII. The alliance countered Bulgaria's ambitions to reclaim the territory lost in Thrace, as Nogai was always ready to attack upon the emperor's request. Constantine Asan abandoned the cities of Mesembria and Anchialos.<sup>127</sup> The Byzantine Empire's alliance with the Golden Horde was directed against Bulgaria, and allowed Nogai to occupy a permanent position on the banks of the Danube. Between 1273 and 1285, he struck coins in his name in Isaccea, with images of tamghas (emblems specific to the Mongols), but also of crosses and two-headed eagles. The association of those symbols has led historians into believing that after 1273 the hinterland of Isaccea was a Byzantine-Mongol

126 Vojnikov 2009, 23–26. The British armorial is published at <http://briantimms.fr/Rolls/lordmarshals/lordmarshal01.html> (visit of March 28, 2016).

127 Pachymeres, III, 25, v. 5 (ed. Failler, I, 302/303; II, 448/449; FGH B X, 156, 166; FHDR III, 444/445); *Regesten*, III, 57 (nr. 1977); Jireček 1876, 272; Vasiliev 1958, 601; Zlatarski 1972, III, 525–527; Ostrogorsky 1956, 482–483; Margos 1965, 299; Spuler 1965, 60; Soustal 1991, 110, 176, 356; Nicol 1993, 81; Ciocîltan 2006, 6–12; Georgieva 2010, 125; Ciocîltan 2012, 248–250, 254–255; Georgieva 2012, 447; Uzelac 2015a, 138.

condominium. The name of the city, Isaccea, derives in fact from the Tatar name *Saqčy*.<sup>128</sup>

At some point after 1273, Constantine Asan fell ill, and the ambitious tsarina Mary assumed power over a state much diminished by the territorial losses of 1263. Their son, Michael, became tsar at the very young age of three. Aware that Jacob Svetoslav aspired to become tsar in Tărnovo, Mary ordered his execution in 1277, after having adopted him as her son, to lure him into the trap. She fomented dissensions between different groups of boyars and ordered the execution of those whom she regarded as undesirable.<sup>129</sup> Around 1273, Jacob Svetoslav was once again an ally of Constantine Asan, after the death of Stephen V. As he was married to one of the daughters of Theodore II Laskaris and Mary, John Asan II's daughter, Jacob Svetoslav had legitimate claims to the throne in Tărnovo. After the death of Irene, who was the sister of Jacob Svetoslav's wife, Constantine Asan had no legitimate basis to rule, since his second wife (Mary) was not a member of the Asanid family. Mary had, therefore, a serious reason to eliminate Jacob Svetoslav. His murder led to the restoration of central authority over the Vidin region. In 1278/1279, someone wrote on the margins of a Gospel manuscript written in Svrlijig, a town in what had been Jacob Svetoslav's appanage. The note mentions the tsar of Bulgaria, Ivailo, during whose reign the book was written. This could only make sense if the region in question, which was covered by the diocese of Niš, had at that time been reintegrated into the Empire ruled from Tărnovo.<sup>130</sup>

As the effective ruler, tsarina Mary was responsible for rejecting the union of the Bulgarian Church with Rome, which had been discussed at the 2nd Council of Lyons in 1274. That council had in fact been convened to deliberate on the issue of the union of the Patriarchate of Constantinople with Rome, in preparation for a new crusade to the Holy Land. Michael VIII accepted the union in order to prevent Charles of Anjou's plans of attacking Byzantium. He requested that the council declare the Bulgarian and Serbian autocephalous churches non-canonical. However, nothing about that was decided in Lyons. Charles of Anjou sent a canonist to Tărnovo in September 1274, to clarify the issue. Contacts continued until the spring of 1275, when Abbot Bernard

128 Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1995–1996, 202–210.

129 Pachymeres, VI. 1 (ed. Failler, II, 546/547; FGHB X, 170); Jireček 1876, 275–276; Zlatarski 1972, III, 542–543; Hristodulova 1978, 62; Holban 1981, 89; Failler 1981, 236; Soustal 1991, 110; Fine 1994, 182–183; Biliarsky 1995, 147; Georgieva 1995, 183–184; Achim 2008, 205; Georgieva 2010, 126–128.

130 Petkova 1983, 64; Fine 1994, 183; Dimitrov 1998, 198; Petkov 2008, 446; Uzelac 2015a, 116.

of Montecassino reported that tsar Constantine Asan<sup>131</sup> had tried to undermine the peace negotiations between Charles of Anjou and Michael VIII. In 1276, when Mary was the *de facto* ruler, the union with Rome was out of the question, since the tsarina shared the views of Patriarch Ignatios and was a strong opponent of Michael VIII. She had in fact granted asylum to her mother, Eulogia, who had fallen out of imperial grace because of similar views. Moreover, Mary tried to strike an alliance with Baybars, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt. Astounded at the idea of a woman having such political initiative, Baybars rejected the proposal, especially since he had no reasons for starting a war against the Byzantine Empire.<sup>132</sup>

Jacob Svetoslav had meanwhile become an independent ruler in the Vidin region, taking advantage of the political chaos in Hungary that followed Stephen V's death (August 1, 1272). Ladislaus IV (1272–1290) was only ten years old, and another powerful woman—his Cuman mother, Elisabeth—controlled the regency. Until the king's coming of age, for five years, different factions of noblemen fought against each other for power. The duchy of Mačva was ruled at that time by Béla, Rostislav's son, but he was killed on November 15, 1272. Mačva was divided into three march-like, small provinces on the southern border of the kingdom (fall of 1272)—Mačva, Kučevo, and Braničevo. Like Severin, they all received the title of Banat. This reorganization was a direct mirror of the growing power of the barons within the kingdom.<sup>133</sup>

Kučevo and Braničevo remained Hungarian only for a brief period. Two boyars of Cuman origin from the lands under Jacob Svetoslav's rule—Dārman (Dorman) and Kudelin—conquered Kučevo and Braničevo at some point during the fall of 1273. This may have well coincided in time with Svetoslav renouncing his allegiance to Hungary. From their new bases, Dārman and Kudelin conducted numerous attacks against Mačva. The situation did not change until 1291, when the principality of Braničevo was granted by Nogai to

131 Who is called *imperator de agora* (i.e., of *Zagora*, a name frequently used at that time for Bulgaria).

132 Pachymeres, VI. 1 (ed. Failler, II, 544/545–546/547; FGHB X, 169–170); Gattola 1734, 354; Jireček 1876, 275; Zlatarski 1972, III, 529–536; Gjuzelev 1977a, 51; Andreev 1978, 68–72; Failler 1981, 236; Hristodulova 1978, 61, 63; Biliarsky 1998, 80–86; Dimitrov 1998, 197; Georgieva 2010, 125–127; Georgieva 2012, 447. For the council and the Byzantine reaction, see Ostrogorsky 1956, 484–486; Geanakoplos 1959, 258–276; Gjuzelev 1977a, 50–51; Nicol 1993, 53–57; Fine 1994, 186–187; Turcuş 2001, 73–81.

133 Petkova 1983, 64; Dimitrov 1998, 192–194; Achim 2008, 187–200; Uzelac 2015a, 118.

Stephen Dragutin. Nogai's man of choice had until then ruled over Mačva as a vassal of Hungary.<sup>134</sup>

Despite the Bulgarian-Cuman expansion in the northwest, at the expense of the march-like provinces created on the southern border of Hungary, the frequent raids of Nogai's Tatars into the core area of Bulgaria under the rule of Constantine Asan caused much devastation and a state of general despair, which is responsible for the peasant revolt of the summer of 1277. This revolt was led by a man whom Pachymeres describes a swineherd. His name, Ivailo, was recorded in the marginal note made on the Svrljig Gospel mentioned above, but the Byzantine historian calls him by his nickname Bordokoubas (a Grecized form of the Bulgarian word for lettuce "bărdovka"). Nikephoros Gregoras employs the Greek translation of the Bulgarian word—Lachanas.<sup>135</sup> Under unknown circumstance, the Tatars attacked Ivailo. In retaliation, he formed a company of men who began to fight the Tatar marauders somewhere in southern Dobrudja. In short time, the popularity of this kind of local militia grew and its operations became very effective, to the point that the Tatars decided to withdraw. The victory put Constantine Asan in a bad light, while pushing Ivailo to the fore. Preoccupied with his conflict with Michael VIII, Constantine paid little importance to the danger. At some point during the winter of 1277–1278, Ivailo's warriors, who were headed for Tărnovo, engaged in battle with the tsar's troops and defeated them. Constantine was slain. Ivailo, who had demonstrated real capabilities as a leader despite his modest origins, was proclaimed tsar.<sup>136</sup>

Upon learning about those events in Bulgaria, Michael VIII decided to intervene, in order to support a ruler in Tărnovo who would have been loyal to him. Mičo had a son named John. The emperor married him to his eldest daughter, Irene, and proclaimed him tsar. This solution was also favored by many Bulgarian boyars, who did not want Tsarina Mary any more, and who equally rejected the rule of a swineherd. John (now John Asan III), however, could not assume power in Tărnovo earlier than a year and a half after his

134 Jireček 1911, 335; Rásonyi 1927, 86; Zlatarski 1972, III, 540–541; Koledarov 1979, 79; Petkova 1983, 65; Fine 1994, 181, 220; Dimitrov 1998, 192–193; Vásáry 2005, 104; Achim 2008, 169, 196, 202–203; Uzelac 2008, 172–173; Uzelac 2015a, 118–120; Ninov 2015, 132–133.

135 Pachymeres, VI, 3 (ed. Failler, II, 548/549; FGHB X, 171); Nikephor Gregoras, v, 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 130; FGHB XI, 136); Petkov 2008, 446 (the Gospel of Svrljig); Jireček 1876, 276; Zlatarski 1972, III, 544–546; Hristodulova 1978, 63–64; Failler 1981, 236–237; Pljakov 1986, 269; Soustal 1991, 110; Fine 1994, 195; Vásáry 2005, 80.

136 Pachymeres, VI, 3 (ed. Failler, II, 548/549–552/553; FGHB X, 171–173); Nikephor Gregoras, v, 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 130; FGHB XI, 136–137); Jireček 1876, 276–277; Zlatarski 1972, III, 546–548; Fine 1994, 195–196; Vásáry 2005, 80; Tzanov 2013, 433–444; Uzelac 2015a, 142–143.

wedding. Meanwhile, also in the spring of 1278, Mary married Ivailo, by whom she became pregnant. Her thirst for power was so great, that she overcame the dishonor that she, as tsarina and the niece of a Byzantine emperor, married a swine herd. She requested that her son, Michael, be recognized as heir. With Ivailo as tsar, future military victories would be warranted, as he had proved to be an adept fighter and a pious man.<sup>137</sup>

Ivailo became ruler in Tǎrnovo in the spring of 1278, but immediately faced the opposition of the boyars, who plotted to replace him with Mičo's son (various envoys had come from Constantinople to stir rebellion). Unlike Ivailo, John had legitimate rights to the throne, since his maternal grandfather was John Asan II. Many preferred him to the swineherd who had usurped the throne. In his attempt to put an end to the Tatar raids, Ivailo strove to attract as many boyars as possible on his side, both from Tǎrnovo, and from among commanders of local strongholds. The attacks of Nogai's Tatars, however, continued, and now Michael VIII sent an army commanded by Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotes. George Pachymeres describes the tactics Ivailo employed under the circumstances, which may be best called guerilla warfare: the Bulgarians ambushed the Byzantine troops and continuously harassed them, killing all their prisoners.<sup>138</sup>

Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotes's war in Bulgaria is also described in Manuel Philes's poem mentioned above. In the fall of 1278, Byzantine troops landed at Galata, a small port near Varna,<sup>139</sup> and then advanced through Provaton (Provadija) towards Tǎrnovo. In the course of the year 1279 they carried out operations throughout northern Bulgaria. The citadels of Preslav, Červen, and Loveč were taken, in addition to Vidin. Philes's mention of the "vast lands along the Danube" suggests that Tarchaneiotes wanted to reinstate control over the Danube borderlands of the empire, which had been lost after the 1185 rebellion. That he did with the assistance of the Tatars. Battles were also fought in the mountain area, because the cities of Urbitzion, Koziakos and Krenos, located near the Vǎrbitsa, Kotel and Šipka passes, respectively, are specifically mentioned in the poem. The Byzantine army tried to assume control over the Haemus by occupying strategic positions, which had been involved in previous

137 Pachymeres, VI. 4–7 (ed. Failler, II, 552/553–562/563; FGHB X, 173–178); Nikephor Gregoras, V. 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 130; FGHB XI, 136–137); *Regesten*, III, 71 (nr. 2035, 2036); Jireček 1876, 277; Zlatarski 1972, III, 548–549; Hristodulova 1978, 64–65; Failler 1981, 237–238; Pljakov 1986, 270–271; Soustal 1991, 110; Georgieva 1993, 119, 122; Fine 1994, 196–197; Georgieva 1995, 184; Vásáry 2005, 81; Georgieva 2010, 114, 128–129; Georgieva 2012, 448.

138 Pachymeres, VI. 7 (ed. Failler, II, 564/565; FGHB X, 178–179); Hristodulova 1978, 65; Fine 1994, 197; Georgieva 2010, 128.

139 For this harbor see Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 311–315.

conflicts.<sup>140</sup> The siege of Tǎrnovo took place in AM 6787 (September 1, 1278–August 31, 1279) as indicated in the note on the Svrljig Gospel.

Learning that Tǎrnovo had been taken and Ivailo defeated and possibly slain, the boyars of the opposition faction decided to welcome John Asan III and to surrender Mary to the Byzantines. John Asan III and Irene were therefore recognized as the legitimate rulers in the spring of 1279. To strengthen the authority of the new tsar, Michael VIII granted the title of despot to one of the most important boyars at the court, George Terter. He married John Asan III's sister, after repudiating his wife (who was sent as hostage to Nicaea). Terter was of Cuman origin, a descendent of the Terteroba clan, who had taken refuge in Bulgaria in 1241 because of the Mongols.<sup>141</sup> Ivailo was not dead, though, and he withdrew to Dristra, where he resisted the siege for another three months (according to Manuel Philes, the "witness of the satrap's flight was the citadel of Prista, as it detained him there for three months").<sup>142</sup>

In the summer of 1279, Ivailo regrouped and began to regain control over the passes in the Stara Planina and the Sredna Gora, after failing to take back Tǎrnovo. This time, he had on his Tzasimpakis (Čavušbaši),<sup>143</sup> a Tatar commander whom Nogai had sent to the service of the Byzantine army. Čavušbaši joined Ivailo, because George Terter had thrown him out of Tǎrnovo. After the failed siege of Tǎrnovo, Ivailo and his Tatar ally managed to defeat a 10,000-strong, Byzantine army under the command of the *protovestiaros* Murinos at the battle of Diabaina (July 17, 1279). After that, Ivailo's forces advanced to the south. On August 15, they scored another victory somewhere in the Strandža range of mountains (the outer Zygos), against 5,000 Byzantine soldiers under the command of the *protovestiaros* Aprenos.<sup>144</sup> The location

140 Manuel Philes, ed. Miller, 248–251 (v. 174–177, 210–214, 231–236, 255–258); FGH B X, 143–146; FHDR IV, 160/161; Jireček 1897, 80–82, 84, 85; Zlatarski 1972, III, 560–563; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 312; Soustal 1991, III; Dimitrov 1998, 198; Marinow 2007a, 125–127; Marinow 2007b, 277–278, 282–283.

141 Pachymeres, VI. 8 (ed. Failler, II, 566/567; FGH B X, 179–180); Nikephor Gregoras, v. 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 131; FGH B XI, 137); Jireček 1876, 277–278; Zlatarski 1972, III, 567; Failler 1981, 240; Pljakov 1986, 272; Fine 1994, 197; Vásáry 2005, 65–66, 81–82; Georgieva 2012, 448–449.

142 Manuel Philes, ed. Miller, 252 (v. 260–262) = FGH B X, 146; FHDR IV, 160/161; Jireček 1897, 85; Fine 1994, 198; Vásáry 2005, 81; Marinow 2007b, 277; Petkov 2008, 446.

143 It was supposed that it was the name of a rank: *ceaus-baş*, the chief of the messengers. See Moravcsik 1958, II, 308–309; Vásáry 2005, 82–83.

144 Pachymeres, VI. 19 (ed. Failler, II, 588/589; FGH B X, 181); Jireček 1876, 278–279; Zlatarski 1972, III, 569–570; Failler 1981, 239; Pljakov 1986, 273; Soustal 1991, III, 238, 319; Fine 1994, 198; Vásáry 2005, 83; Tzanov 2013, 440.



of Diabaina is much disputed. It has been identified with Devnija,<sup>145</sup> but that contradicts the general movement of Ivailo's troops. Others believe that the victory was obtained in a battlefield near Devina, a town near the Kotel pass, on the road from Tǎrnovo. Devina appears in Philes's list of strongholds captured by Tarchaneiotes in 1279.<sup>146</sup> But Pachymeres' text is quite clear at this point: the battle was fought somewhere in the vicinity of Tǎrnovo. Murinos came from Tǎrnovo, and Lachanas/Ivailo set his camp in Diabaina. A Bulgarian inscription from Tǎrnovo, mentions that the Momina Krepost hill to the west of Tsarevets used to be called *Devingrad*, most likely because the Old Bulgarian word *deva* means "maiden," the same meaning as that of its modern Bulgarian equivalent, *moma*. The battle of July 17, 1279 was clearly fought in (the outskirts of) Tǎrnovo, and Ivailo's goal must have been to occupy the capital.<sup>147</sup>

Meanwhile, John Asan III learned that many boyars were hostile to him and were planning a rebellion. According to Nikephoros Gregoras, the leader of the conspirators was Terter. In late 1279, John Asan III decided to flee with Irene, not before stealing valuable objects from the imperial coffers (some of them had been captured in the 1190 battle of Tryavna). The two managed to board a ship in Mesembria, and headed for Constantinople. The emperor was outraged by John Asan III's cowardice, and agreed to receive him only after some time.<sup>148</sup> In the meantime (probably in late 1279), Terter was proclaimed tsar in Tǎrnovo. Ivailo, however, had not given up to his claim to power, and believed that he could obtain Nogai's assistance for his plans. The situation became even more complicated when John Asan III arrived at Nogai, after being prompted by Michael VIII to attempt to regain power in Tǎrnovo. Nogai was now the arbiter between the two contenders who had brought rich gifts. He first ordered the execution of Ivailo and Čavušbaši. John Asan III would have been next, had his sister-in-law, Euphrosyna, not intervened.<sup>149</sup> John Asan III returned to Constantinople and lived for the rest of his life in the Empire (he was granted the title of despot in 1284 and died in 1302 during a war against the Alans).

145 Koledarov 1979, 80; Pljakov 1986, 273; Pavlov, Vladimirov 2009, 103.

146 Manuel Philes, ed. Miller, 249 (v. 213) = FGHB X, 144; Jireček 1897, 82; Zlatarski 1972, III, 570; Soustal 1991, 238, 319; Vásáry 2005, 83.

147 Angelov 1980, 116–120; Malingoudis 1981, 98–99.

148 Pachymeres, VI. 9 (ed. Failler, II, 566/567–568/569; FGHB X, 180); Nikephor Gregoras, v. 3 (transl. Van Dieten, I, 131; FGHB XI, 137); Jireček 1876, 278; Zlatarski 1972, III, 570–571; Failler 1981, 240–241; Pljakov 1986, 273–274; Vásáry 2005, 82; Tzanov 2013, 440.

149 Pachymeres, VI. 19 (ed. Failler, II, 590/591; FGHB X, 181–182); Jireček 1876, 279; Zlatarski 1972, III, 572–573; Failler 1981, 241; Pljakov 1986, 274–275; Fine 1994, 198; Vásáry 2005, 83; Ciociltan 2006, 13; Uzelac 2015a, 145–146.

His numerous children carried on the Asan family name, not just in Byzantium, but also in Italy and in Moldavia. Among his descendants was Maria Asanina Palaeologina, or (Mary of Mangop), the second wife of Stephen the Great, the ruler of Moldavia (1457–1504). The family's history after 1280 is, however, beyond the scope of this book.<sup>150</sup>

With George Terter firmly in power in Tărnovo, the rule of the Asanids in Bulgaria came to an end in 1280. The dynasty had already been extinguished on the male line in 1257. True, some members of the Shishman family bore the name Asan, and they may have been genuinely related to the Asanids.<sup>151</sup> However, 1280 marks a turning point in the history of medieval Bulgaria, because after that date and until the 1340s, the empire became a satellite of the Golden Horde, first under the dynasty founded by George Terter, which lasted until 1322, and then under the dynasty founded by Michael Shishman in 1323. No other historical detail illustrates the new political status of Bulgaria better than the fact that George Terter had to send his son, Theodore, as hostage to Nogai's court, while one of his daughters was taken for the harem of Čaka, the son of Nogai.<sup>152</sup>

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150 Krekić 1973; Trapp 1976; Božilov 1981, 142–149; Božilov 1985, 247–434. For the wife of Stephen the Great, with whom she was married between September 1472 and November 1477, see Gorovei 2006, 56–59.

151 Božilov 1981, 138; Božilov 1985, 119 (Michael Shishman was supposed to be descended from *sevastokrator* Peter).

152 Pljakov 1986, 280, 284; Ciocîltan 2006, 13.

## Fortifications

There were a number of strongholds in the Second Bulgarian Empire, which had been initially built by the Byzantines. Many have been mentioned in the previous chapters. The period covered in this book also witnessed the development of siege engines, which were used by all armies—Western, Byzantine, and Islamic. Bulgaria made no exception in this regard, as already indicated.<sup>1</sup> The strategies developed in the 12th to 14th century will only change in the middle decades of the latter century with the invention of cannons. The use of artillery, however, at least during the initial phase was greatly influenced by the concepts guiding siege engines based on gravity or human force.

Without any claims to an exhaustive presentation of fortifications dated to the 12th and 13th centuries inside the Second Bulgarian Empire,<sup>2</sup> this last chapter is limited to the description of the fortifications mentioned in the previous chapters.

### The Capital

The Tsarevets hill, which has an approximately triangular shape, and the monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul monastery are surrounded by the Yantra river, which separates them from the Trapezitsa hill. Access to Tsarevets is therefore possible only from the southwest over some sort of a natural bridge. The hill was occupied by a 5th- to 6th-century, early Byzantine city identified as Zikideva, then re-occupied in the 12th century. Elements of the early Byzantine construction phase have been found to the southeast from the hill as well—a 2.6–3.2 m thick wall laid in emplecton with a cross-beam. After becoming the residence of the Asanids, the 12 ha area of the citadel was surrounded with a rampart—2,000 m long and between 2.4 and 3.6 m thick—that was built at about 40–50 m above the river. This rampart partially overlaps that of the early Byzantine fortification. The fortress could accommodate some 3,000 people. Archaeologists have so far discovered 370 houses and 22 churches. The main entrance, located in the southwestern corner,

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1 Contamine 1986, 149–167; Purton 2009, 379–387.

2 A general description of their features at Tsončev 1955. They are thoroughly discussed by Barakov 2015.

is actually a complex of three successive gates, of which the second is at 18 m away from the first gate, with the third at another 45 m. A second entrance into the city (2.5 m wide) is located 200 m to the north from the main entrance, approximately in the middle of the western curtain wall. A three-story tower built above it defends this entrance. The gate linked the citadel to the neighborhood in which the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul was located. There is another small opening to the far north leading to the same church. A 2.5 m-wide gate is located in the southern corner, 45 m from the tower in southeastern corner, otherwise known as the “Baldwin Tower.” That tower overlooked the entire area to the southern, the most likely direction of any attack against the city. The northern area has been surveyed both from the tower of the secondary entrance and from the northern corner, next to which the execution stone is located, from which criminals were supposedly thrown off the cliff. During the 11th century, a 2.7 to 3.2 m-thick, protective wall was built along the river, complete with towers and battlements. Some of the towers also served as wells. One of them was linked through a bricked passage to the river (see Figures 7–12).<sup>3</sup>

The second fortification of Tǎrnovo is located on the right bank of the Yantra River, to the west from Tsarevets. The name of this hill—Trapezitsa—probably derives from its flattened top, much like a table—*trapeza*, in Bulgarian. A bridge over the river links Trapezitsa with the secondary gate of Tsarevets. The area enclosed by walls is 8.5 ha large, at 75 m above the river. Of irregular, quadrilateral shape, the fortification was built in mid-12th century by the Byzantines, and then expanded by the new rulers of Tǎrnovo. A large number of houses and public buildings have been found here, in addition to 17 churches. The archaeological excavations by the southwestern gate brought to light coins buried in the foundation and dated between 1187 and 1190. This building phase, therefore, coincides in time with, or immediately follows the 1190 attack of the Byzantine army. After 1230, a new curtain wall was built.<sup>4</sup> The northern gate was the main entrance into Trapezitsa. The gate guards lived in a 6.4 by 31.8 m, double-storied building attached to the western rampart. The building had seven rooms and may well have been the residence of the military commander of Tǎrnovo.<sup>5</sup> A particular feature of the Trapezitsa is

3 Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 25–32; Vǎlov 1992, 196–197; Dočev 2002, 673–676; Murdzhev 2008, 144–145, 224–225; Barakov 2014a, 3–18; Barakov 2015, 125–130, 135–142, 241–251.

4 Popov, Aleksiev 1985, 37–39; Dolmova 1995, 36–42; Dolmova-Lukanovska 2008; Aleksiev 2009; Rabovyanov 2010, 114; Dočev 2011; Rabovyanov 2014, 391–392; Barakov 2015, 131–133.

5 Karailiev 2009.



FIGURE 7 *The entrance in the Tsarevets fortress.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



FIGURE 8 *The system of the three gates.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

the large, irregularly shaped tower by the northern gate, 41.3 m long and 26.5 m wide. The tower had three stories, each divided into three large rooms. The first building phase of the tower has been dated to the early 13th century, and coincides in time with the building of the northern gate, as well as of the eastern and northern ramparts. The second phase was in fact a restoration and has



FIGURE 9 *Gate 1.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

been dated some fifty years later, to the mid-13th century. The tower may have initially been 18 m tall. The large size of this tower makes it the most likely station of the city's garrison (see and Figures 13–14).<sup>6</sup>

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6 Dermendžiev 2009.





FIGURE 10 *Gate II.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

### The Danube Bank

For two centuries, the river Danube served as the northern border of the Byzantine provinces of Dristra (the name of which changed in 1059 to Paradunavon) and Sirmium. The stronghold built along the Danube, some anew and others on top of older Roman fortifications, were meant to guard the main fords across the river at Nufăru, Isaccea, Garvăn, Hârșova, Dervent, and Silistra. Those were the fords most commonly used by enemies of the empire coming through Moldavia—the Rus', as well as the Pechenegs, and the Cumans. But the strongholds ultimately failed to stop the attacks of those enemies.



FIGURE 11 *The small gate and the fortified settlement of Trapezitsa.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



FIGURE 12 *"The tower of Baldwin", seen from outside.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.





FIGURE 13 *The fortified settlement of Trapezitsa.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



FIGURE 14 *The northern tower of Trapezitsa.*  
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

As a consequence, in the late 11th century Emperor Alexios I Comnenos reconfigured the entire defense system in the region, while shifting the emphasis away from the southern bank of the Danube River to the Stara Planina range.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-12th century, the emphasis of the Byzantine defense on the Danube frontier shifted again, this time to the west, in the context of the war with Hungary. Three major strongholds received special attention in the western sector—Belgrade, Braničevo, and probably Vidin. With the rise of the Asanids, all strongholds on the southern bank of the Danube, or at least those that were still in good shape, were taken over by the new rulers. Belgrade and Braničevo were also taken in 1199, then lost in 1203, recovered in 1204, and ultimately relinquished to Hungary in 1214. During the 13th century, the fortification of Belgrade was the same as it had been under Manuel Comnenos, specifically after 1155: a 60 by 136 m-large fort inside the ruins of the Roman city of Singidunum. In Braničevo, the area enclosed by walls was twice as large, no doubt in order to accommodate more troops.<sup>8</sup>

The strongholds occupied by Johannitsa in 1199 continued to serve both as support bases during the military conflict with Hungary, and as checkpoints for monitoring traffic along, but especially across the river. It is interesting to note in this context that when, in 1199, Johannitsa took over the region called Craina in the valley of the river Cerna his troops also occupied and restored the ancient Roman fortification at Drobeta. The archaeological excavations in the southwestern part of that fort revealed a small polygonal, stone fortification, which pre-dates the timber-and-earth fortification most likely built by Hungarians after the creation of the Banat of Severin in 1232. The polygonal fortification has two moats and 2 m-thick walls built of spolia—stones taken from the nearby Roman ruins—but with no foundation. A 3.65 m-wide entrance on the eastern side connects the polygonal fortification with a circular tower with between 2 and 2.6 m-thick walls. Inside the fortification, a coin struck for John Asan II was found in a well, thus dating the end of occupation of the stronghold, which may have coincided with the creation of the Banat of Severin. There was also a triconch church similar to those in Târnovo.<sup>9</sup> If this fortification was built by Bulgarians in the late 12th or early 13th century, as it seems likely, then it must have served as a bridgehead on the northern bank of the river, next to the territory called Severin (“northern”) because only because it was located north of that base. So far, nothing similar is known on the

7 Madgearu 2013a, 85, 113–114, 143–144, 168.

8 Popović, Ivanišević 1988, 126–129; Popović 1991, 172–174.

9 Davidescu 1969, 13–23; Cantacuzino 2001, 106–117, 129, 255; Ioniță 2005, 50, 128–129; Achim 2008, 82–88.

opposite, southern bank (now in Serbia). The late Roman and early Byzantine fort in Kostol (ancient Pontes) was re-occupied in the early 11th century.<sup>10</sup> The building of a circular tower and of a polygonal fort at Drobeta makes no sense without a similar fortification on the opposite side of the river. If one assumes (as Romanian archaeologists do) that the polygonal fort in Severin, much like that in Grădeț, was built by Romanians from some polity in western Oltenia, then how can one explain the name Severin (“northern”)? Mișu Davidescu, the excavator of the polygonal fort in Drobeta, tried to circumvent the problem by proposing that the name was in fact given during the 9th or 10th century, at a time when the First Bulgarian Empire controlled the lands north of the river Danube.<sup>11</sup> The problem with that, however, is the absence of any evidence that a fort, polygonal or otherwise, existed in Drobeta at that early date.

By contrast, there is clear evidence of a reoccupation in the 9th century of the site of Roman Bononia. The current Bulgarian name—Vidin—derives from the Roman name of the city. Vidin was conquered by the Byzantines in 1002 after a 9-month siege, and immediately incorporated into the stronghold system along the southern bank of the Danube. It must have fallen into the hands of the Vlach and Bulgarian rebels at some point after 1185. The still standing fortress (called Baba Vida) is rectangular and 5000 sqm large. There is only one entrance on the northern side. The stronghold is surrounded by a 12 m-wide and 6 m-deep moat, which was filled with water. The current form of the stronghold, with its double curtain wall, is the result of the rebuilding under Ivan Stratsimir, the tsar of Vidin (1356–1396). The fortress was occupied by the Ottomans, who reused it (which is why it survived almost intact). The 2.2 m thick, 9th-century wall of the inner precinct has nine towers, one of which (no. 3) was built in the 13th century.<sup>12</sup>

The written sources mention that in 1261 the stronghold in Lom was attacked. Although the actual fortress has not been found, there are many 13th-century coin finds that point to the presence of a large and important settlement in Lom. In Oryakhovo (Rakhov), the medieval fortress is located 500 m to the north from the present-day town. Its ramparts enclose a rectangular area, of 750 sqm. The fortress was built in the 13th century, on a site different from that of the neighboring Roman fort at Appiaria. The walls are 1.5 m thick. On the southern side, there is a rectangular tower with 1.35 m thick walls. Oryakhovo was besieged in 1266, and the stronghold is mentioned as *castrum*

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10 Marjanović-Vujović 1986, 122.

11 Davidescu 1985, 107.

12 Michailov 1961, 1–8; Kuzev 1968, 37–47; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 98–108; Milanova 2009; Barakov 2014b, 624–635; Barakov 2015, 146–148.

*Vrchov* in a 1283 charter on behalf of Gregory, the Ban of Severin.<sup>13</sup> Further downstream along the Danube, the stronghold at Svištov must be somewhere within the area of the former Roman town of Novae. The fortification already existed in the 12th century, for it is mentioned by al-Idrisi as *Suvestcastro*, but was destroyed by the Mongols in 1242. Only a coin hoard is known from the site.<sup>14</sup>

One of Bulgaria's most important towns was Dristra (Drăstăr, later Silistra). During the 11th and 12th centuries, Dristra was the center of the theme by that same name, which was renamed Paradunavon after 1059. The importance of Dristra as an administrative and military central place declined when the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire was established in Tărnovo. The polygonal fortification erected in the 6th century, covering a 5 ha area, was used continuously throughout the Middle Ages. A smaller fortification was added on the southern side in the 11th century. The destruction inflicted by the Mongol invasion of 1242 was considerable: the metropolitan church was torn down and never rebuilt, and two hoards have been found, which had been buried underneath several sections of the thick burned layer.<sup>15</sup>

The first stronghold in northern Dobrudja to produce evidence of an occupation related to the Second Bulgarian Empire is Turcoaia, in the Tulcea County. The western stronghold has a trapeze-shaped plan and is 150 m long and 80 m wide. The Roman fortress at Troesmis was restored and reoccupied in the 11th century. The stronghold was attacked and destroyed by Pechenegs in 1036 and 1122, and completely dismantled by the Mongols in 1242.<sup>16</sup> Isaccea was the most important center of Byzantine Dobrudja, rivaling the position it had in Late Antiquity as Noviodunum. The walls of the early Byzantine fort were restored at some point after 971, as indicated by the archeological excavations of the northern rampart, and of 6 rectangular towers, each 9.6 by 10 m large. On the eastern side, a new, 285 m long curtain wall was built. The archeological excavations revealed serious destruction coin-dated to 1095 and 1122. More and later destruction may be linked to the Mongol invasion of 1242.<sup>17</sup>

13 Hurmuzaki, *Densușianu* 1887, 462 (doc. CCCLXXII); CDH, V/3 (1830), 157; Kuzev 1968, 29–36; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 116–117, 120–121.

14 Kuzev 1967, 44–51; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 149–150; Atanasov, Pavlov 1995, 235.

15 Kuzev 1969, 138–143; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 180–187; Atanasov, Pavlov 1995, 237; Atanasov 2014, 564; Barakov 2015, 150–151.

16 Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 49–50; Damian 2005, 163–165; Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2010, 441–448.

17 Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 57; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 72; Damian 2005, 173–174; Aparaschivei, Bilavschi 2009, 186.

The stronghold closest to the sea was Nufăru, on the bank of the St. George branch of the Danube Delta. The Byzantines apparently built this fort shortly after the region was occupied in 971. This is a large fort, with 6 ha of enclosed area. The enclosure wall was about 2.7 m thick. Five towers have been identified on the eastern, northern and western side, as well as overlooking the harbor. Nufăru may well be Presthavitza known from the written sources. During the late 11th and early 12th century, the stronghold grew into a large town, with 144 houses excavated until 2011. However, the Pechenegs inflicted serious destruction in 1122, after which the suburbs were abandoned. The greatest damage, however, came with the Mongols in 1242. A few decades later, however, the town was repopulated, albeit on a much smaller scale.<sup>18</sup>

### The Area between the Danube and the Stara Planina

In addition to Tărnovo, there are several strongholds between the mountains and the Danube, which functioned during the 11th and 12th centuries within the limits of the theme of Paradunavon, and were then occupied by the Vlach and Bulgarian rebels. At Preslav, for example, which had been the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, the walls built and rebuilt between the 9th and the 12th century were still standing in 1185, which explains why the rebels failed to take the town in 1186. Both Peter and Mičo resided in Preslav, which they both preferred to any other town in Bulgaria. Preslav was destroyed by the Mongol invasion in 1242, and then by the Byzantine army in 1279. There is an Inner and an Outer Town. The former has an irregular shape, covering about 20 ha. The 2.8–3 m-thick walls run for 2 km, with circular towers at the corners. Within the Inner Town, the rulers of the First Bulgarian Empire built palaces, the patriarchal church, and administrative buildings. The Outer Town is in fact a suburb surrounded another wall, which runs for 6.5 km, enclosing an area of 3.5 square km. The Outer Town has gates to the north and to the southeast, while the Inner Towns has three gates—north, east and south.<sup>19</sup>

To the north from Preslav, at a crossroads between Dristra, Varna and Tărnovo, stands the city of Šumen. The site of the 12th- to 14th-century town was inhabited since Bronze Age—a multi-terrace, 400–500 m tall plateau with

18 Mănucu-Adameșteanu 1998, 80, 82; Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 64; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003b, 72; Damian 2005, 177–183; Damian et alii 2007, 110–118; Damian et alii 2012, 177–191; Madgearu 2013a, 103–104.

19 Jordanov 2002; Žekova 2004, 346–347; Murdzhev 2008, 150, 281; Štereva 2009, 72–75; Žekova 2013, 303–318; Barakov 2015, 152–156.

a total area of 2.8 ha enclosed by a double curtain. In addition, there is a trapeze-shaped two-stories citadel at the highest point in the northeastern part of the plateau. The citadel ( $39 \times 31 \times 39 \times 40$  m) has an area of 1350 sqm. Five towers defend the outer curtain, while the inner curtain, which largely overlaps the early Byzantine ramparts, has 11 towers. The town grew especially after the mid-13th century, no doubt taking advantage of the rapid decline of Preslav.<sup>20</sup>

Closer to the Danube, the stronghold at Červen occupied a plateau in the valley of the river Lom. The Pechenegs destroyed the Byzantine fortress in 1034–1036. During the 13th century, the fortress was rebuilt to enclose a total area of 20 ha. Inside the enclosure, there is a citadel covering 2000 sqm, which was built in the early 13th century, then restored and reshaped after 1230. Like Šumen, Červen grew especially after the middle of the 13th century, after its destruction by Mongols in 1242 (it was nonetheless destroyed by the Byzantines again in 1279). Most notable among the archaeological finds from Červen are catapult projectiles—rounded rocks of about 50 cm in diameter—discovered in a storage room inside the citadel.<sup>21</sup>

To the west, the stronghold of Loveč, in the valley of the river Osām, was built on the site of older settlements. The stronghold built during the First Bulgarian Tsardom was taken over by the Byzantines, then by the Vlach and Bulgarian rebels, at some point before 1188, as Isaac II put it under siege, with no results. The 12th- to 13th-century fortress covers an area of 10 ha, of which about 2.8 ha are for the Inner Town. During the 13th century, the city became sufficiently important to be a bishopric. Mongols attacked the stronghold in 1242, and the Byzantines in 1279.<sup>22</sup>

### The Area between the Stara Planina and the Rhodopi Mountains

The most important fortification in this region was Philippopolis (Plovdiv), one of the few cities in the Balkan Peninsula for which there is a continuous occupation from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Located on the important road connecting Constantinople to Sofia, Belgrade and Niš, the city occupies a dominant position in the plains, as it was built on three hills. During the Middle Byzantine period, it was the seat of a *strategos* subordinated to the duke of Adrianople. After 1187, the city changed hands many times between

20 Antonova 1995; Žekova 2006, 13–42, 61–62; Murdzhev 2008, 154–155; Popov 2009, 322–336.

21 Dimova, Georgieva, Neševa 1985, 33–131; Rabovyanov 2003; Murdzhev 2008, 149, 226; Barakov 2015, 157–164.

22 Čangova 1966; Dimitrov 1992, 82–85; Murdzhev 2008, 155, 225; Barakov 2015, 164–165.

Bulgaria and the power established in Constantinople (either the Byzantine Empire or the Latin Empire). Moreover, the city was torn down in 1189, and the ramparts were not rebuilt until 1197. Johannitsa occupied the city briefly in 1204, and his army returned in the summer of 1205 to destroy the city as a punishment for its inhabitants siding with the Latin Empire. After 1208, the Latins controlled the city, which became the center of a duchy of *Finople*, which John Asan II occupied in 1230 (the 1229 agreement between John of Brienne and the barons of Constantinople mentions Philippopolis). The Latins again conquered the city in 1236 or 1237, and then the Nicaeans took it most likely in 1242. In 1254, Philippopolis was again in Bulgarian hands, but returned to the Byzantines in or shortly after 1262, when Constantine Asan attacked the city and the neighboring stronghold of Stenimachos.<sup>23</sup>

Stenimachos, also called Petritzos (now Asenovgrad) is in fact at a distance of 19 km to the south from Plovdiv, at the foot of the northern slope of the Rhodopi Mountains, on the banks of the Čepelarska Reka, at 1.5 km from the Čepelare pass. This stronghold, first built in the Iron Age by local Thracians, is perched on a ridge with steep slopes. A 2.9 m thick outer wall protects the 1.3 ha of the fortress. The wall is still 3 m tall at several points. The inner wall is approximately 2.2 m thick and is made of stone ashlar bound with mortar. There is only one entrance on the southwestern side. A donjon dominates the highest elevation to the west. This was most likely the residence of the commander. The Byzantine fortification was built at some point during the 10th century. Ivanko made it his residence in 1197, but Alexios III captured it in 1200. The stronghold fell to Renier of Trit in the fall of 1204, to Johannitsa in July 1206, and finally to Despot Slav. John Asan II conquered it in 1230, and he began its restoration. The Nicaeans took Stenimachos in 1246, but Michael Asan recovered it eight years later, before Theodore II Laskaris reoccupied it in 1255. Briefly under Bulgarian rule in 1262–1263, the Byzantines then took the stronghold back.<sup>24</sup>

Kritzimos (now Krichim) is located at a distance of 26 km to the southwest from Plovdiv, at the foot of the Rhodopi Mountains, 170 m above sea level. Known as Ivanovo kale, the stronghold is on the left bank of the Vača River, a tributary of the Maritsa. It has a quadrangular shape, covers an area of 1500 sqm, and was built over a late Roman fortification. The 1.4 m thick ramparts are laid in emblecton, with cross beams, and ashlar bonded with mortar on the sides. The entrance is on the southeastern side. The stronghold was built

23 Asdracha 1976, 154–159; Soustal 1991, 400–401; Barakov 2015, 171.

24 Tsončev, Stoilov 1960, 3–57; Asdracha 1976, 162–166; Cankova-Petkova 1978c, 517–524; Malingoudis 1979, 60–62; Soustal 1991, 460–461; Barakov 2015, 193–196.

in 1197–1198 by Ivanko, then conquered by General Manuel Kamytzes in 1199. It was Slav's after 1207, then John Asan II's after 1230. Lost to the Byzantines in 1246, Kritizmos was recaptured in 1254 by Michael Asan. An inscription was found that commemorates that event.<sup>25</sup>

Tzepaina (Tsepina) is in a valley of the Rhodopi Mountains, 5 km to the north from Dorkovo, on an important road to Macedonia. The stronghold is perched on a very steep hill and has the shape of a trapeze with 2 ha of enclosed area. The 1.5 to 2.6 m thick ramparts are laid in emblecton with cross beams and sidings of ashlar bonded with mortar. There are five buttresses attached to the wall. The entrance is on the southeastern side, with a tower to the northeast. The stronghold was built in the early 13th century by Despot Slav, who used it as his residence before moving to Melnik. Along with Stenimachos and Kritizimos. John Asan II occupied the stronghold in 1230, followed by John III Vatatzes in 1246. Briefly reclaimed by the Bulgarians in 1254, it withstood Theodore II Laskaris's siege in 1255, only to be occupied by Nicaeans as a result of the peace negotiations of June 1256.<sup>26</sup>

### Western Macedonia

The most important town in the region was Melnik (Melenikon). Located on the Struma River, Melnik was inhabited since the Thracian period. A poorly known fortification was built here in the Late Roman period. Bulgarians built the medieval fortification in the 10th century on the Sveti Nikola hill. The Byzantines took the town in 1014. Asan conquered Melnik in 1195, during his campaign in Macedonia. Shortly after that it began to grow into a fully-fledged town under the rule of Alexios Slav, who rebuilt the ramparts. By the time John Asan II conquered Melnik in 1230, the town had spread onto the Čatala hill. The Byzantine army occupied Melnik in 1246, and the 1255 rebellion of some of its inhabitants did nothing to change the situation. The eastern curtain still stands at 10 m height. The fortification has a polygonal shape, with 0.3 ha of enclosed area. The citadel is only 30 m wide and 80 m long, with 2 m thick

25 Asdracha 1976, 168; Malingoudis 1979, 73; Soustal 1991, 325–326; Petkov 2008, 427; Barakov 2015, 200–201.

26 Tsončev 1959, 285–304; Georgieva, Gizdova 1966, 41–56; Tsončev 1966; Asdracha 1976, 170–173; Soustal 1991, 488–489; Barakov 2015, 196–198.



walls, and a massive tower in the southwest corner, which monitored access to the valley.<sup>27</sup>

Prosakos fortification (now Prosek, in the Republic of Macedonia) is on the right bank of the Vardar River at the entrance into the Demir Kapija pass. The stronghold was built on a steep hill in the 10th century over an early Byzantine fortification. Only fragments of the northern and western walls have been preserved. After Johannitsa took it over from Dobromir, most likely in the autumn of 1203, the fortification fell to Strez, who held it until 1214. Theodore Angelos Comnenos Dukas occupied it after that, and in 1246—the Nicaeans.<sup>28</sup>

### The Black Sea Shore

The ports on western coast of the Black Sea were also fortified, just like the inland cities. Unfortunately, Anchialos and Agathopolis are mostly submerged. Significant information in terms of defense systems is only available for Mesembria and Varna.

During the Second Bulgarian Empire, Mesembria (now Nesebăr) was the most important port. Established as a Greek colony in 510 BC, this port was inhabited almost without interruption from Antiquity to modern times. It is located in the Gulf of Burgas, at the eastern end of the Stara Planina range. An important part of the medieval town is now under water, and only a peninsula of 25 ha (out of an estimated 40 ha of enclosed area) is still visible. The defensive system of the town originated in the 5th century BC. The medieval walls were built after the earthquake of 1063. The western rampart survives at a height of 10 m, with four towers and the main gate flanked by two other towers. The port was conquered by Johannitsa in 1201 and remained under Bulgarian rule until 1263, when Mičo moved there.<sup>29</sup>

Varna is one of the best harbors for sailing in the Black Sea. The city was established as a Greek colony named Odessos. After its destruction in the 7th century, the Slavs who settled this area gave the name Varna to the new settlement, which was rebuilt in 681. This was the name by which the Byzantines came to know it. After 971, the city once again came under Byzantine rule. The 11th- to 12th-century fortification covered a much smaller area than that

27 Dujčev 1968, 28–41; Pljakov 1973, 186–193; Georgieva, Neševa 1989; Rabovyanov 2007, 81–82; Barakov 2015, 186–188.

28 Kravari 1989, 149–150; Mikulčik 1996, 229–230.

29 Velkov 1966; Gjuzelev 1978, 52–53; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 325–341; Soustal 1991, 355–357; Prešlenov 2002; Panova 1996, 70–71; Barakov 2015, 215–216.

of the Roman city—170 m wide and 220 m long. The 2 m thick walls of the curtain had 13 towers. There was a citadel on the western side (28.5 by 38 m), which was the point of access to the rest of the fortification. The 11th-century stronghold was conquered by Vlachs and Bulgarians in 1190, and recovered by the Byzantines in 1193. Johannitsa took Varna after the siege of 1201 and the city remained under Bulgarian rule until the Ottoman conquest of 1386 (although, after 1369, it was part of the Despotate of Dobrotich and Ivanko).<sup>30</sup>

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30 Kuzev 1962, 111–126; Kuzev 1972; Kuzev, Gjuzelev 1981, 293–297; Kuzev 1985, 73–76; Barakov 2015, 212–214.

## Conclusion

The history of the Vlach-Bulgarian state created in the aftermath of the 1185 uprising has four distinct phases. The first may be called secessionist. This was one example of a broader pattern of dissent and rebellion in the European provinces of the Byzantine Empire, which directed against the central government's fiscal abuses since the days of Peter Deljan. Moreover, the first phase coincided with the rise of a new ideology, based on the restoration of the former Bulgarian Empire. It is no accident that one of its first military operations of the rebels, although ultimately unsuccessful, was to conquer the Empire's former capital in Preslav.

The second phase started with the *de facto* recognition of the new state by Constantinople in the summer of 1188. The ideology of the revived imperial power had been clearly visible since 1189, when Peter asked Frederick I Barbarossa to recognize his imperial title. This second stage was marked by two important events: the meeting with an actual emperor—other than that in Constantinople; and the first military victories against the Byzantines, which led to a partial reoccupation of the former territories of the First Bulgarian Empire. Johannitsa's desire to obtain the imperial title (*Imperator Bulgarorum et Blachorum*) in return for embracing Catholicism was a key element in his negotiations with Pope Innocent III, which started in 1199. However, as Johannitsa's title was not recognized by Hungary, the pope granted to Johannitsa only the title of king of Bulgaria and Vlachia, the title that Johannitsa eventually assumed upon his coronation in Tărnovo on November 8, 1204.

The implementation of the political idea of territorial sovereignty (*imperator / rex Bulgariae et Vlachiae*) in response to challenges both from Hungary and from the Latin Empire, as well as an effort to emulate the state models of those two powers, are the defining factors of the third phase. This phase corresponds to the institutional consolidation of the Empire, which took place after 1203—the establishment of the Catholic archdiocese, and Johannitsa's coronation as king. During this phase, the imperial title was justified in terms of the Roman origin of the Vlachs, which has been suggested by the pope as a source of legitimacy. In the fourth phase, the source of legitimacy becomes solely the First Bulgarian Empire, which explains the abandonment of Vlachia from John Asan II's title. After Klokotnitsa, he took the title of *autokrator/samodăržets* in imitation of the Byzantine emperor. This is further emphasized by John Asan II's decision to strike his own coins. On the other hand, the title of "Tsar of the Bulgarians and Greeks," which imitated Symeon's 10th-century title, shows that John Asan II regarded himself as successor of the

Byzantine Empire. The title was in fact a description of reality, given that after Klokotnitsa, Bulgaria gained supremacy in the Balkan Peninsula. The Vlach population of the Empire did not vanish, but was not represented anymore in the official title, since that title was now supposed to reflect the claim to the imperial inheritance of Constantinople. The break with Rome, which took place in 1233–1235, also eliminated the need for the idea of the Roman origin of the Vlachs as a source of political legitimacy. These were the circumstances in which the Empire assumed a complete and definitive Bulgarian identity. As George Murnu put it, “the Asanids, who were only interested in legitimating their title of tsar, and were blinded by tradition, did not realize that by neglecting or removing the Romanian element, they would establish a tenuous reign.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the political ideology of the state created in the aftermath of the 1185 uprising of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians has moved from secession to (Byzantine) succession, to affirm a new Bulgarian Empire. The state also inherited from 9th- and 10th-century Byzantium those centrifugal tendencies, which have made its own existence possible. Such tendencies manifested themselves especially after the death of the most authoritarian emperors—Johannitsa and John Asan II. Boyar factions—some of which wanted closer ties with Hungary and/or Rome, the other with the Byzantine Empire—raised various rulers to the throne, sometimes with foreign intervention. Some local leaders, linked by kinship and interests to those who have introduced Western-type feudalism to the Balkans, carved their own polities centered upon strongholds perched on inaccessible cliffs, while others received territories and privileges from the tsars. In the end, the continuous reduction of central authority resulted in the separation of the Vidin region.

Johannitsa's option for Catholic Christianity was purely political, the result of his search for political legitimacy. As his authority would have never been recognized in Constantinople, the pope was the alternative. From the pope's point of view, Johannitsa offered an unexpected opportunity to expand the influence of the Church of Rome into the Balkans and to strengthen the Latin presence in Constantinople. The papal project failed politically when Johannitsa went to war against both the Latin Empire and Hungary. In the words of Ilie Minea, a now forgotten historian,

A Latinized Balkan Empire ruling over both sides of the Danube would have been a threat to the southern and eastern parts of Hungary and to Transylvania, two regions where the new Empire could claim old rights

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1 Murnu 1984, 197.

and many brothers. The kings of Hungary have instinctively foreseen that danger; both Emeric and Andrew II became his enemies. Thus, after the Romanians who had settled on the left bank of the Danube and have helped the Bulgarians build the empire, decide to leave just as the Cumans did, the Hungarian kings used every opportunity to conquer the Romanian element, and to draw the Cumans to their side. That was the policy of the Hungarian kings throughout the 13th century.<sup>2</sup>

Johannitsa embraced Catholicism opportunistically, because of purely political interests. When, less than three decades later, he entered an anti-Latin alliance with the emperor of Nicaea John III Vatatzes, John Asan II returned to Orthodoxy, and established the Patriarchate of Târnovo in 1235. Switching back and forth between the Western and the Eastern Church was a purely political choice for the ruling class of the Second Bulgarian Empire, with little, if any impact on the religious practices of the tsar's subjects.

The state created by the Asanids may have contributed to some extent to the establishment of the first Romanian polities in the lands north of the river Danube, particularly because of the Bulgarian presence in Oltenia during the first three decades of the 13th century. Moreover, the lands north of the river were most likely regarded as under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Târnovo, which explains the presence within the Cuman diocese of those "pseudo-bishops" mentioned in 1234. At any rate, there is no better explanation for the adoption of the Slavonic liturgy in the lands north of the river Danube, than the ecclesiastical jurisdiction that Târnovo exercised over those lands. This is true even if one admits that the ecclesiastical influence from Bulgaria pre-dates the events of the early 13th century and may in fact go back to the First Bulgarian Empire.<sup>3</sup> That in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, the Romanians in the lands north of the Danube favored Greek-Bulgarian Orthodoxy over Catholic Hungary suggests that the efforts of the Greek and Bulgarian clergy had to be at least as intense and persuasive as those of the Hungarians, although the historical details of those efforts remains obscure.

The Romanian voivodes and knezes mentioned in 1247 in the charter for the Hospitallers lived in the lands to the east and to the west from the river Olt. They were Tsar Kaliman's contemporaries. The settlement excavated in Cetățeni has been convincingly dated around 1200, that is to the period when Johannitsa is known to have occupied a part of Oltenia. Next to the present-day monastery on top of the hill known as the "Stronghold of Negru Vodă,"

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2 Minea 1912, 232.

3 Sacerdoțeanu 1968, 254–257.

a fortification was built in the 13th century that recycled the ruined walls of an Iron-Age (Dacian) fort, bonded with mortar. At the foot of the fortification hill, archaeologists have discovered a 13th- to 14th-century settlement, including a church with remains of mural paintings that may be dated shortly before or after 1200. An earthquake that may have taken place in the mid-13th century ruined the church. A triconch church was built shortly after that, which remained in use until the first decade of the 14th century.<sup>4</sup> The fortification, the church, and the adjacent settlement have been interpreted as the residence of a Romanian voivode. Squeezed between Hungary to the north and to the west, and the Cumans to the east, that voivode may have well sought the protection of the tsar ruling over the lands south of the river Danube. One of the pseudo-bishops of 1234 may have even visited the church in Cetățeni. After the Mongol invasion, the power center of Wallachia moved farther to the north, namely to Curtea de Argeș. With the Second Bulgarian Empire rapidly declining, those who now ruled from Curtea de Argeș were on the look for another protector, either the Golden Horde or Hungary.

During the reign of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331–1371), Walachian rulers indirectly assumed the political legacy of the Asanids. Each one of them adopted the name Ioan (John), abbreviated as IO and added to their intitulation. To be sure, this is one of the most controversial issues of the Romanian medieval history. Bogdan P. Hasdeu believed that IO stood for Johannitsa, who had been crowned by the pope.<sup>5</sup> Following in Hasdeu's footsteps, Dimitre Onciul, according to whom the Asanids had "laid the foundation of the Romanian state on the left bank of the Olt River," regarded both Romanian rulers and Bulgarian tsars as "descendants of the glorious Asanids."<sup>6</sup> Ioan Bogdan noted that Nicolae Alexandru (1352–1364) first adopted the title in imitation of the Bulgarian tsars, who had adopted the name of John. However, there was no connection to Johannitsa.<sup>7</sup> Petre P. Panaitescu refuted the idea that the Bulgarian chancery began to use the title after the Byzantine emperor John v Palaeologos (1341–1376).<sup>8</sup> The IO particle appears in John Asan II's inscription in the church of Târnovo, which was the source of inspiration for Tsar Ivan (John) Alexander, from whom John Basarab took it later. All rulers of Wallachia

4 Chițescu 1992; Cantacuzino 2001, 156–161, 167–175; Cățoi 2010, 180, 186.

5 Hasdeu 1973, 175–179.

6 Onciul 1968, I, 411–412, 614–615.

7 Bogdan 1889b.

8 That theory had been introduced by Lascaris 1931 and Ciurea 1944.

called themselves John (Ioan), abbreviated as IO in their intitulation.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Dan Ioan Mureşan returned to Onciul's theory of a direct line of succession from the first Asanids, but offered no new evidence.<sup>10</sup>

The Asanids and, after them, Ivan Alexander were the bearers of an imperial idea, rulers of an empire seeking to supplant the Byzantine Empire. That was the essence of their state ideology, and the first rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia could not have possibly adopted or conceived such a political ideology, which was illustrated, among other things, by the concept of a Third Rome (as Târnovo was called during Ivan Alexander's reign). Whether or not such an imperial idea appeared at all at Stephen the Great's court after the demise of the Byzantine Empire, that is a matter of much debate among historians, which is beyond the scope of this book.

In the end, the only certain legacy that the Asanids left to Romanians north of the Danube was the Slavonic language, which has survived in both Church and state administration. Without the establishment of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Târnovo in 1235 and without Bulgaria breaking away from Rome, their history would have been different.

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9 Panaitescu 1987, who demonstrates that the full name of the founder of Wallachia was John (Ioan) Basarab. Although ignoring Panaitescu's study, Mureşan 2010, 390–406 reached the same conclusion.

10 Mureşan 2011, 754–755.





# Abbreviations

AA	<i>Archives de l'Athos</i> , Paris
AAnt	Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest
AARMSI	Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice, București
AB	Archaeologia Bulgarica, Sofia
AEMA	Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi, Wiesbaden
Alași	Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie “A. D. Xenopol” (Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A. D. Xenopol”), Iași
AM	Arheologia Moldovei, Iași
AMV	Acta Musei Varnaensis, Varna
Arkh	Arkheologija, Sofia
	<i>Bălgarija v Evropejskata kultura</i> <i>Bălgarija v Evropejskata kultura, nauka, obrazovanie, religija. 1. Materiali ot četvărtata natsionalna konferentsija po istorija, arkheologija i kulturen turizm “pătuvane kăm Bălgarija”</i> (Šumen, 14–16.05.2014), Šumen, 2015
B	Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines, Bruxelles
BB	Byzantinobulgarica, Sofia
BF	Byzantinische Forschungen, Amsterdam
BHR	Bulgarian Historical Review, Sofia
BM	Bulgaria mediaevalis, ed. V. Gjuzelev, V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, K. Nenov, Sofia
BS	Balkan Studies, Thessalonica
BSH	Bulletin de la Section Historique de l'Académie Roumaine, Bucarest
Bojana	<i>Bojanskata tsărkva meždū Iztoka i Zapada v izkustvoto na khristijanska Evropa</i> ( <i>The Boyana Church Between the East and the West in the Art of the Christian Europe</i> ). Pod redaktsijata B. Penkova, Sofia, 2011
<i>Byzantium and the Bulgarians</i>	K. Nikolaou, K. Tsiknakis (ed.), <i>Vyzantio kai Voulgaroi (1018–1185) / Byzantium and the Bulgarians (1018–1185)</i> , National Hellenic Research Foundation, Institute of Byzantine Research, International Symposium 18, Athena, 2008
<i>Byzantium, New Peoples, New Powers</i>	<i>Byzantium, New Peoples, New Powers: The Byzantino-Slav Contact Zone, From the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century</i> , ed. M. Kaymakamova, M. Salamon, M. Smorąg-Rózycka (Byzantina et Slavica Cracoviensia, V), Cracow, 2007
ByzSl	Byzantinoslavica, Praga
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift, München
CCDJ	Cultură și civilizație la Dunărea de Jos, Călărași
CCM	Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale. X <sup>e</sup> –XII <sup>e</sup> siècles, Poitiers
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>

- CHBE *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. by J. Shepard, Cambridge, 2008
- Chronicles and Memorials* *The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*, London
- Cities, Residences and Fortresses Thracian, Greek, Roman and Medieval Cities, Residences and Fortresses* (Corpus of Ancient and Medieval Settlements in Bulgaria, 2), Sofia, 2014
- CL Convorbiri literare, Iași, București
- CDH *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis, studio et opera G. Fejér*, Buda
- CDP *Codex diplomaticus patrius*, ed. I. Nagy, Győr
- Cyrrilomethodianum Cyrillomethodianum. Recherches sur l'histoire des relations helléno-slaves, Thessalonie
- DAW Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften, Wien
- DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Washington DC
- DRH D I *Documenta Romaniae Historica, seria D. Relații între Țările Române*, vol. I (1222–1456), București, 1977
- EBPB Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines, Bucarest
- ECEEMA *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450*, General Editor F. Curta (Brill), Leiden, Boston
- EH Études Historiques, Sofia
- EHB A. E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, 3 vol., Washington DC, 2002
- EtBalk Études Balkaniques, Sofia
- FGHB *Fontes Graeci Historiae Bulgaricae (Grätzki Izvori za bălgarskata istorija)*, ed. M. Vojnov, V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, L. Jončev (vol. VII, Sofia, 1968; VIII, Sofia, 1972; vol. X, Sofia, 1980; vol. XI, Sofia, 1983)
- FHDR *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. III. *Scriptores Byzantini, saec. XI–XIV* (ed. A. Elian, N. Ș. Tanașoca), București, 1975; vol. IV. *Scriptores et acta Imperii Byzantini, saeculorum IV–XV* (ed. H. Mihăescu, R. Lăzărescu, N. Ș. Tanașoca, T. Teoteoi), București, 1982
- FLHB *Fontes Latini Historiae Bulgaricae (Latinski Izvori za bălgarskata istorija)*, vol. III, Sofia, 1965 (ed. I. Dujčev, S. Lišev, B. Primov, M. Vojnov (ed.)); vol. IV, Sofia, 1981 (ed. M. Vojnov, V. Gjuzelev, S. Lišev, M. Petrova, B. Primov)
- Fontes Pontificia commissio ad redigendum codicem iuris canonici orientalis. Fontes, series III*, Vatican
- FRB *Fontes Rerum Byzantarum sumptibus Academiae Scientiarum Rossicae*, accuravit W. Regel, Petropoli, 1917

- Henri de Valenciennes, *Istorisirea* Henri de Valenciennes, *Istorisirea despre împăratul Henric al Constantinopolului*. Introducere, traducere și note de T. A. Fluieraru, București, 2015
- HU Historia Urbana, București
- IBAI (IAI) Izvestija na Bălgarski Arheologičeski Institut (ulterior Izvestija na Bălgarski Arheologičeski Institut), Sofia
- Identities* *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*. Edited by J. Herrin, G. Saint-Guillain, London, 2011
- INMV Izvestija na Narodnija Muzej (anterior: Izvestija na Varnenskoto Arheologičesko Družestvo), Varna
- IP Istoricheski Pregled, Sofia
- IRIMVT Izvestija na Regionalen Istoricheski Muzej, Veliko Tărnovo
- Istorie bisericească II* *Istorie bisericească, misiune creștină și viață culturală, vol. II. Creștinismul românesc și organizarea bisericească în secolele XIII–XIV. Știri și interpretări noi. Actele sesiunii anuale de comunicări științifice a Comisiei Române de Istorie și Studiu a Creștinismului*, ed. E. Popescu, M. O. Cățoi, Galați, 2010
- Istoriikii* *Istoriikii*. Šumenski Universitet Episkop Konstantin Preslavski, Šumen
- JMMH The Journal of Medieval Military History, Rochester
- JÖB Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik, Wien
- Mar Nero Il Mar Nero. Annali di archeologia e storia, Roma-Paris
- MBFO Mitteilungen des bulgarischen Forschungsinstitutes in Österreich, Wien
- MCA Materiale și cercetări arheologice, București
- MGH-SRG *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, Berlin
- MGH-SS *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores in folio*, Berlin, Hannover
- MMPEC *The Medieval Mediterranean Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1453* (Brill), Leiden, Boston
- MN Muzeul Național, București
- ODB *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, prepared at Dumbarton Oaks*, editor in chief A. P. Kazhdan, New York, Oxford, 1991
- OEMWMT *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology*, editor in chief C. J. Rogers, 3 vol., Oxford, New York, 2010
- PL J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, Paris
- PLP *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, Wien
- Prinosi* *Prinosi kăm bălgarskata arkheologija*, Sofia
- Răscoala* *Răscoala și statul Asăneștilor*, București, 1989
- RB Revista Bistriței, Bistrița
- RdI Revista de istorie, București
- REB Revue des Études Byzantines, Paris

- RESEE Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes, Bucarest
- RHSEE Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen, Bucarest
- RIst Revista istorică, București
- RIM Revista de Istorie Militară, București
- RN Revue Numismatique, Paris
- RRH Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, Bucarest
- SAW Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historische Classe der kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien
- SB Studia Balcanica, Sofia
- SBN Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, Roma
- SBS Studies in Byzantine Sigillography, Washington DC
- Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken* P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, Teil I. Einleitung und Text; II. Historischer Kommentar; Teilübersetzungen, Addenda et Corrigenda, Indices*, Wien, 1975–1979
- SMIM Studii și materiale de istorie medie, București
- SOF Südost-Forschungen. Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte, Kultur und Landeskunde Südosteuropas, München
- The Medieval Bulgarian* *The Medieval Bulgarian and "the Other" (Srednovekovnijat Bălgarian i "Drugite")*. *Sbornik v čest na 60-godišnjata na prof. din Petăr Angelov*, ed. A. Nikolov, G. Nikolov, Sofia, 2013
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- The Steppe Lands* *The Steppe Lands and the World beyond them. Studies in honor of Victor Spinei on his 70th birthday*, ed. F. Curta, B. P. Maleon, Iași, 2013
- TR Transylvanian Review, Cluj-Napoca
- Urbs capta* A. E. Laiou (ed.), *Urbs capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences / La IVe croisade et ses conséquences* (Réalités byzantines, 10), Paris, 2005
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- ZRVI Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta, Belgrade

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